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THE GAY OF THE LAND:

QUEER ECOLOGY AND THE LITERATURE OF THE 1960S

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Mississippi

Jill E. Anderson

April 2011

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ABSTRACT

In this dissertation I argue not only that queer ecology is a legitimate and important next step for ecocritics and queer theorists but also that its literary application does a great amount of good in exploring and dismantling the natural/unnatural binary and exposing the ecological impact of the choices humans make everyday. I take as my method a combination of queer and environmental theory and literary criticism, as well as the foundational queer ecocritical works and include important historical and political perspectives influencing the emergence of the environmental and gay and lesbian movements. Through this dissertation, I legitimize more recent American literature, namely that of the 1960s. My reinvented canon includes works traditionally read as either environmental texts or queer texts so my task will be to claim each work for both the queer and environmental side, as well as a combination of both. Also, I argue that the importance of contemporary literature to queer ecology lies in its historical, social, and political situations.

My first chapter, on Ken Kesey's *Sometimes a Great Notion*, the author's second novel, explores the deep and abiding homosociality present in the story of the Stamper family, a logging clan in Oregon. I frame my argument about the homosocial (and homosexual) activities of communities of male loggers in the Northwest by addressing the primary homosocial relationships in the novel—those between Joe Ben and Hank Stamper (despite the fact they are both married) and Hank and his brother Leland. Kesey uses these relationships to dismantle and discount the presence of heterosexuality and

reproduction in the novel. While the physicality displayed by the men of the logging community is often read by critics as Kesey's way of reinscribing a macho, pioneer mentality into an American literature populated by flaccid men, I read these moments erotically, underscoring their occurrence in the space of the forest as a necessary to the enactment of homosociality. In the second chapter, on Isherwood's *A Single Man*, I show how George, the novel's main character, acts a barometer for the ecological destruction enacted by the "breeders"—the families and their children—who surround him. While mourning the sudden death of his longtime partner, George critiques the functioning of heterosexual couples, their offspring, rampant growth and construction, and the general environmental destruction occurring in California at the time. While the novel is traditionally read as a text that empowers and normalizes a gay man in a long-term relationship, I argue that these critics are ignoring the environmental signs spread throughout the novel. Isherwood reverses the paradigm of queerness as unnatural by making reproduction unnatural, but instead of imposing new binaries in the narrative, Isherwood introduces touching and play as a way of dissolving boundaries. Jane Rule's *Desert of the Heart*, which comprises my third chapter, centers on Evelyn, a woman who travels to Reno to seek a divorce from her husband. While there, she meets, falls in love, and has an affair with a young woman named Ann. Despite Evelyn's admission that the younger Ann makes her feel like a "mother," the two have a sexual relationship which simultaneously confirms and erases this familial relationship. Like in *A Single Man*, *Desert of the Heart* contains moments of play and touch which seek to reinforce the

importance of sexual exploration across seeming boundaries as well as normalize and bolster same-sex relationships. Also, as with Isherwood's novel, the current criticism on *Desert of the Heart* tends to highlight the politics of Ann and Evelyn's relationship. While the focus on the sexual politics of the lesbian relationship is not remiss, it ignores the pivotal environmental factors that Rule includes. It is the Nevada landscape that often affords the pair the freedom to escape and love without the policing eye of the casino in which Ann works, the ranch where they live, and the other divorced women there. Rule equates the barrenness of the desert with the couple's animality, revising the narrative of ecological barrenness by including in the couple's rich and totally naturalized love affair. The fourth chapter focuses on Margaret Atwood's first novel, *The Edible Woman*. Atwood presents the narrative of Marian, a woman in rebellion. On the surface, Marian buys into the heteronormative narrative of marriage and childbirth, but her body tells her otherwise. What occurs in *The Edible Woman* is a series of strange bodily incidents in Marian—she runs (read: escapes) senselessly from her nearly-fiancée, retreats into the "womb symbol," the space beneath the bed, finds her tongue and stomach turning against her as she increasing is unable to eat, and then enacts another escape from her future-husband. All of these things add up to a rebellion against marriage and the consumerism tied up to it. While the novel is often read as a proto-feminist novel in which Marian is punished with an anorexia forced upon her by narcissistic men and patriarchy in general and then "fights back" by the cannibalization of the cake shaped like a woman, I read the novel as a critique of not only the marriage

system and a narrative that reinforces the Mother as the Ultimate Woman (embodied in the novel by the perverse, unmarried Ainsley and the married, distracted Clara) but also a forced and destructive system of "Production-consumption," as Duncan explains, a system which forces its unnatural food products on consumers. I read Marian's gradual starvation as a deliberate challenge to the rotundity and productiveness of pregnancy.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated Mama & Daddy, Irene & Paul, Don & Mary.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The majority of my indebtedness goes to Dr. Jaime Harker, my dissertation director, who has seen many of these chapters in some of their most incoherent forms and who continued to support me and my work despite my mental disarray. Her accommodating yet insightful approach to mentorship allowed me keep my autonomy as a scholar without making me feel lost and unaided. Thank you also to my other committee members, Drs. Karen Raber, Jay Watson and Cate Sandilands, for their invaluable recommendations, encouragement, and the time they poured into my multiple drafts. I also acknowledge the University of Mississippi Graduate School for providing a fellowship to aid my research as well as the Department of English at Ole Miss for giving me funding to travel to conferences in order to present versions of the present chapters. Thank you also to Jim and Dian, Daddy and Mama, for endowing me with the genetics—namely, dogged stubbornness, discipline, aptitude, verve, self-sufficiency, optimism (well, from Mama at least) and adventurousness—I needed to pursue all of my difficult goals. And finally, I credit my husband Jonathan for keeping my personality in check throughout the process, without whose support I would be adrift, and who challenges my mind in infinitely original ways.

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INTRODUCTION

QUEERING ECOCRITICISM AND GREENING THE NON-NORMATIVE

> Above all, remember that planned, well-spaced children will starve, or vaporize in a thermonuclear war, or die of plague just as well as unplanned children.
>
> –Paul Ehrlich, *The Population Bomb*, 1968

> Only in America would a housewife hop into a two-ton vehicle and drive downtown to buy the thumbtacks she forgot to buy on her regular shopping trip.
>
> –Vance Packard, *The Waste Makers*, 1960

> The threat homosexuality poses to heterosexuality is its own contingency, and open-endedness, its own tenuous hold over the multiplicity of sexual impulses and possibilities characterizing all human sexuality. Its own un-naturalness, its compromise and reactive status. Queer pleasures show that one does not have to settle for the predictable, the formulaic, the respected, although these too are not without their cost.
>
> —Elizabeth Grosz, "Experimental Desire"

A COLD WAR CONTEXT

Queer ecology is a critical framework that explores the interrelatedness of both queer theory and ecocriticism. Readings in queer ecology tease out meanings of the term "natural" and open up the potential for reimagining the value of both the other-than-human world and queer sexualities. When applied as literary criticism, queer ecology

investigates notions of heterosexism, family formation, and human manipulation of the environment. The postwar period in America is a particularly abundant in images of the valorized nuclear family and the ravaged countryside, along with socially and governmentally sanctioned depletion of resources and the persecution of homosexuals and any other "queers." Literature of the period is also rife representations of both human-created environment disaster (see Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* or even Dr. Seuss's *The Lorax*) as well as the remarkable if at times unstable or fraught nuclear family (see Sloan Wilson's *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* or Grace Metalious's *Peyton Place*).

The period after World War II, as many historians have observed, was a time of unprecedented expansion in the population as well as the economy in the United States.[1] With men returning home from the warfront, the demand for comfortable homes outfitted with the latest laborsaving devices increased. The G.I. Bill not only helped those men buy homes and start businesses of their own but also encouraged them to go to college at the government's expense, allowing many to pursue careers that might not have been available to them otherwise. The suburbs spread, and the personal automobile became the most popular form of conveyance. The average age of marriage dropped significantly,[2] with men and women often marrying right after high school, while the

[1] See Alexander Wilson's *The Nature of Culture* for an in-depth look at North American cultural interpretations of the natural world in the years after the Second World War. In it, he calls for a consideration of how we should "build landscapes that heal, connect and empower, that make intelligible our relations with each other and with the natural world: places that welcome and enclose, whose breaks and edges are never without meaning" (17). Wilson makes this call because of his recognition that the period after World War II brought about unprecedented ecological alteration.

[2] In the preface of a 1960 home economic textbook entitled *Personal Adjustment: Marriage and Family Living*, Judson and Mary Landis reveal the textbook caters to readers who are marrying younger. The section titles uncover the narrative in which the textbook's authors are invested: "Understanding Yourself and Others," "Dating," "Looking Toward Marriage," "When You Marry," and "When You Become a Parent." Notice the use of the term *when* in relationship to marrying and childbearing. To be fair, the

Baby Boom, typically placed between the years 1946 and 1964, represented a marked increase in the birth of babies.[3] Contraception in the form of The Pill was marketed specifically to married women beginning in 1960, highlighting the importance of well-planned and chosen children to a stable marriage. Women were again relegated to the domestic space, and children were raised in Dr. Spock's idiom of treating them as self-actualized individuals with needs of their own. Consequently, the nuclear family with their home, automobile, and consumer products became the emblem of the prosperous and proper American way of life.

The suburban nuclear family of the 1950s, i.e. Mom, Pop, Dick, Jane, and Spot, is characterized in popular imagination by an almost unquestioned valorization.[4] In the world of the archetypal nuclear family, typified by television families such as the Cleavers, the Nelsons, the cartoonish Jetsons, no one ever goes hungry, raises their voice, or worries about the threat of nuclear warfare. Every problem is easily resolved within a

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Landises do not explicitly encourage marriage at an early age, but they do provide several quizzes throughout the chapters to help readers decide whether they are ready to be married. And, indeed, as Friedan suggests in *The Feminine Mystique*, in the magazines marketed toward women in the postwar period the "happy housewife heroines seem strangely younger than the spirited career girls of the thirties and forties. They seem to get younger all the time—in looks, and in a childlike kind of dependence" (93).

[3] I have not forgotten about the advent of birth control in the form of The Pill in the late 1950s and early 1960s. I think it is important to point out that birth control was only available to *married* women starting in the 60s; unmarried women did not have free access to the Pill until the 1970s. (The same thing applied to the diaphragm, causing unmarried women to borrow wedding rings in order to trick doctors into giving them diaphragms and showing them how to use them.) This highlights a telling disparity in the rhetoric of birth control: it was *supposed* to be used only by women in socially sanctioned unions for the purpose of solidifying those unions through sex as well as with the intention of careful and stable family planning. As Elaine Tyler May so aptly puts it: "contraception in the postwar years encouraged scientific family planning, rather than premarital sexual experimentation or alternatives to motherhood for women" (*Homeward Bound*134). In other words, early uses of the Pill only reinforced the larger cultural narratives rather than upsetting them and creating alternatives. The Pill created a narrative of super-heterosexuality, giving the opportunity for potentially procreative couples to give free reign to their desires. See also May's *America and the Pill: A History of Promise, Peril, and Liberation*, and for a discussion about the history of the United State government's involvement in sex education and the dissemination of other forms of birth control, see Alexandra M. Lord's *Condom Nation*.

[4] See Carolyn Herbst Lewis's *Prescription for Heterosexuality* for a discussion about the way the medical profession, headed by the American Medical Association, constructed, reinforced, and perpetuated a "healthy heterosexuality" in public discourse.

reasonable and comfortable amount of time to the satisfaction of all concerned.[5] But, in *The Way We Never Were*, Stephanie Coontz reveals that the nuclear family of popular imagination has no basis in social reality. It thrived not only because of policies of containment but also "partly a result of the media's denial of diversity" (31). Coontz argues that the nuclear family was a "historic fluke" enabled after the Second World War, a period in which wages, spending, and therefore consumption increased.[6] Many factors, combined with the government's ability to distribute "educations benefits, housing loans, highways and sewer construction, and job training," "encouraged early marriage early childbearing, expansion of consumer debt, and residential patterns that required long commutes to work" (28-9). As Coontz points out, the postwar years in the United States were a period of unprecedented family building, consumerism, and domestic insulation. Despite her admission that the nuclear family of Ozzie and Harriet's ilk is the stuff of myth and clever marketing, Coontz's acknowledgement of the "historical fluke" does uncover an important truth—the coincidence occurred, nonetheless, and one can find some truth to the ideology behind the nuclear family if only in the fact that the model was

[5] For discussions on the representations of 1950s fictitious television families and their impact on American culture and society in general, see Ella Taylor's *Prime-Time Families: Television Culture in Postwar America* and Nina C. Leibman's *Living Room Lectures: The Fifties Family in Film and Television*.

[6] The "Sixties Family," David Steigerwald argues, was losing its "primary function," that of the "nurturing of children in a private environment isolated from the processes of production and commerce" (251). The children remained the focus of the 1950s family and became fully enmeshed in the marketplace, according to Steigerwald, since "[t]he fifties cult of the family was not truly a revival of family the nineteenth-century cult of domesticity: in the earlier form, the woman was to find fulfillment in subordinating herself to her husband's will; in the fifties, fulfillment was gained vicariously, through the development of the children" (251). W.T. Lhamon's *Deliberate Speed: The Origins of a Cultural Style in the American 1950s* articulates a similar position—the 1950s, at least artistically and culturally, was not a period of wholesale consensus. Rather, he argues for a reading of 1950s culture as "deliberately speeding"—moving ahead, yes, but at a careful and plotted pace. He accounts for this deliberate speed through "poplore," the combination of folklore and pop culture, the melding of white and black cultural modes, the restructuring of tradition, and the prevalence of new technological media, including readily available recording devices and the television. With a similar premise that the 1950s was not a decade of unquestioned consent, Alan Petigny likewise argues that the "consumerist ethos" of the postwar period "encouraged American to yield to the influence of the popular culture, and in doing so, take less of their cues from their neighbors and family" (8-9). The result, according to Petigny, is that the country turned "away from the repressive worldly asceticism that had long undergirded a conservative world outlook" (9).

so readily embraced and normalized in the dominant discourse during the Cold War years. Securing one's future (and the future of the country) depended upon building up a population of healthy, stable and entirely "normal" American citizens.[7]

But besides actually (re)producing those citizens, Americans had another responsibility to their country—engaging in the postwar economic climate by buying and consequently disposing. An examination of studies from the period reveals varying concerns with the intersection between the Baby Boom, the proliferation of the nuclear family, its buying habits, and the impacts on the environment. It is not just the sheer number of children being born during the period at stake here but also their families' attitudes toward resource usage, land management, and the creation of waste. An explicit link between the growing population and the increasing pressure put on land and natural resources is evident in various authors' calls to action. As early as 1948, Fairfield Osborn, in *Our Plundered Planet*, urges readers to remember the "cardinal principle in

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[7] Joyce Johnson's 1983 memoir *Minor Characters* describes her life in 1950s and 60s New York City and her relationship with the king of the Beats, Jack Kerouac. Sheltered as a child by an overprotective parents and forced into piano lessons by her thwarted mother, Johnson justifies her need for rebellion and escape into her own non-materialistic home and the company of the Beats. In the beginning of the memoir, Johnson portrays her parents' home in 1950s New York City as a kind of domestic hell full of stilted dreams and too many meaningless objects. Thinking "painfully, of a room," the living room specifically, Johnson describes the "the terrible poignancy of this room of gratifications deferred, the tensions of gentility. It's as if all these objects—the piano, the rug, the portrait—are held in uneasy captivity, hostages to aspiration. It the slipcovers ever came off, if the heavy drapes are drawn aside letting in the daylight, everything that has been so carefully preserved will be seen to have become frayed and faded away" (13-4). I include this description (although there are countless others I could have chosen) to illustrate the effect that consumerism and the overprotective nuclear family of the 1950s could potentially have on the children of that generation. Johnson's discomfort stems from her parents' material objects, their expectations, and the containment she feels while at home. I do not think Johnson's example is an extreme one but merely representative of the burgeoning youth movement that began to solidify in the mid-50s. In fact, Coontz counts the institutionalization of the youth culture during the 1950s and early-60s as one of the contradictions of the traditional 50s nuclear family (38). For a discussion about the youth movement's representation and role in 1960s television programming, see Aniko Bodroghkozy's *Groove Tube: Sixties Television and the Youth Rebellion*. Bodroghkozy highlights televisions ability to bring the world to the viewer, making them more sophisticated citizens, at the same time it promoted isolation and "family togetherness." He also shows how, once the youth rebellion of the later 1960s began and the youth, who were raised in front of the television, began to reject television as a legitimate medium, networks worked to bring baby boomers back in front of the screen by including images and representations of the counterculture and hot political issues.

the recently developed science known as 'conservation'"—namely, "[a]ll the component parts in the machinery of nature are dependent one upon the other" and that when human beings, "the new geological force," fail to recognize this, they are treading in dangerous and destructive territory, not just for themselves but also the natural world. His primary concerns lie in the implied effects of "the children of the earth," because "each day in every land they come, insistently in such numbers, the daily host reproducing the human species the world over" (3). In 1960 Marion Clawson and others published *Land for the Future* in which they undertake the task of figuring out how best to "reconcile the demands that an advancing and dynamic civilization makes on land, within the framework of a still spacious but no illimitable natural endowment" (18). "The Tragedy of the Commons," Garret Hardin's 1968 essay, explores human beings' hubris and the embedded belief that they have the *right* to exploit and use up the earth's resources and space without much consideration for the far-reaching implications of that belief. Hardin insists, "To couple the concept of freedom to breed with the belief that everyone born has an equal right to the commons is to lock the world into a tragic course of action" (1246). That is, to populate the earth with human beings who inherit the implicit belief that each and every one of them has a birthright to a fixed and certain quantity of resources is to intrinsically destroy an already limited cache.

These connections between population and environmental damage during the postwar period are not incidental or even sporadic.[8] Of the period's studies that connect

[8] See also: William Vogt's 1948 *Road to Survival*, Georg Bergstrom's *Too Many*, published in 1969 and *The Hungry Planet*, published in 1965. And for an extensive history of the various social and political implications of population control around the world, see *Fatal Misconception: The Struggle to Control World Population* by Matthew Connelly. The discussion of the population "problem" was also intimately bound up in the controversy surrounding birth control methods, particularly the Pill. For a thorough discussion on the history of birth control, see Lara V. Marks' *Sexual Chemistry: A History of the Contraceptive Pill*.

the marked increase in population with the destruction of the environment, arguably the most famous and controversial is Paul Ehrlich's 1968 *The Population Bomb*. The population bomb was the idea that overpopulation—the fault of too many people breeding more people exponentially—was the originary cause of the world's environmental problems.[9] The argument was in vogue in the years following the Second World War. By using the word "bomb" in its title, Ehrlich encouraged a marked anxiety toward the specter of too many people, invoking dire and absolutist nuclear imagery. Consequently, biologists, sociologists, and historians presented a seemingly simple solution to overcrowding and destruction of natural resources: curbing the world's population. This would assuage the damage being done to the planet and ensure that the world's food supplies would be able to sustain an already out of control global population. In fact, 1972's *The Limits to Growth* presents a mathematical model of exponential population growth and resource usage in order to conclude: "If the present growth trends in world population, industrialization, pollution, food production, and resource depletion continue unchanged, the limits to growth on this planet will be reached sometime within the next one hundred years" (Meadows, et al. 23). More recent scholars point out that the connection between population and resource scarcity is an oversimplification of the matter, and expressing an anxiety about too many people often borders closely on reinforcing elements of eugenics.[10] Indeed, these are problems, but

[9] For a discussion about the debate between Paul Ehrlich and Barry Commoner about the source of environmental destruction in that period and the absurdity of even finding a "root cause," see Jeffrey C. Ellis's "On the Search for a Root Cause: Essentialist Tendencies in Environmental Discourse." For a contemporary look at the feud, see Constance Holden, "Ehrlich vs. Commoner: An Environmental Fallout."

[10] Ehrlich answers the eugenics question in the section of the book entitled "What Can You Do?" by accusing people who bring up eugenics as being eugenicists themselves. He advises that if anyone brings up the eugenics question, namely the question of the "right" kind of people—the smart ones—being allowed to breed, one should answer, amongst other things: "Anyone really concerned with raising the level of intelligence in our population should fight to raise the environmental component. We *know* that drastic

despite everything Ehrlich misses in *The Population Bomb*, he does target Americans' general material comfort, an inclination established during the postwar economy, and their unending appetite for more and *more* as a large part of the globe's environmental problems:

> We, of course, cannot remain affluent and isolated. At the moment the United States uses about one-third of all the raw materials consumed each year. Think of it: less than 1/15th of the population of the world requires about five times its 'fair share' to maintain its inflated position. […] So, besides our own serious population problem at home, we are intimately involved in the world crises. We are involved through our import-export situation. We are involved because of the possibilities of global ecological catastrophe, of global pestilence, and of global thermonuclear war. (129)

I cite both Ehrlich's and Meadows' studies as representative of the rhetoric set forth in the 1950s and 60s and carried on into the 1970s. At their most basic levels, both examples illustrate the intermingling of concerns about reproduction and resource (over)usage, and even if the direct correlation between population and dwindling resources is currently uncertain, the present work values the contemporary debate, opinion and scientific discourse as a means of uncovering the historical moment when the issue became prescient. Perhaps the terms have changed, but the ideas about sustainability remain prescient in our time. And if the specter of total annihilation was prominent during the period, it was not necessarily always the threat of nuclear war that

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increases can be made in one generation by improved home and school situation and in some cases improved diet" (172). Focus on improving people's environmental conditions now since worrying about the intelligence of future human beings is futile. He also attempts to avoid the eugenics question by stating that the relationship between birth rate and death rate is the most critical solution to the problem. If enough people just die off, then we do not even have to worry about curbing our reproduction.

concerned commentators.

But Ehrlich's mention of America's affluence brings another important element into the conversation about population and the environment—production and consumption. In fact, the middle-class nuclear family of the postwar economy was often centered around consumption.[11] The period of unprecedented economic growth and spread of American families after the Second World War exacerbated the problem of the use of resources and the production of consumer products. It initiated the full embrace of what Vance Packard in 1960's *The Waste Makers* calls the "throwaway spirit."[12] Much of the problem of a consumer society, one in which all citizens are expected to participate fully, is the residual effects. This means that consumerism is merely one component in an entire cycle. After an item has been produced, the persuasion of the consumer leads to the purchase of the item, after which, according to Packard, comes the waste.[13] Packard argues: "If you are a producer, and most families already own your product, you are left

[11] For a recent study about the ecological impact of consumption in economies and ecosystems around the world, see Peter Dauvergne's *The Shadows of Consumption*.

[12] Interestingly, Packard's solution to the "throwaway spirit" and the rapid depletion of resources is to return to a sense of prudence and restraint in purchasing and value the quality of consumer goods over quantity and disposability—both actions urged by contemporary sustainability initiatives.

[13] Vance Packard's earlier study, 1957's *The Hidden Persuaders* exposes the underlying consequences of consumerism in the Cold War period—consumers are often "tricked" into buying more and more by the producers, leading to the waste of more and more. The premise of *The Hidden Persuaders* is that the people in charge of advertising "are systematically feeling out our hidden weaknesses and frailties in the hope that they can more effectively influence our behavior" (5). Packard identifies the eight "hidden needs" to which advertisers attempt to appeal when they target consumers. Among these "needs" are: "emotional security," "reassurance of wealth," "a sense of roots," and "immortality" (72-81). I highlight these particular needs because they clearly appeal to people who seek security and containment. Packard's indictment of the "hidden persuaders" housed within the advertising industry paints a picture of consumers who are under the duress of clandestine controls. Advertisements for the latest kitchen gadget or automobile appeal to a consumer's sense of self-worth and need to participate as a citizen in a consumer society. Packard also published *The Sexual Wilderness* in 1968. He prefers to call the "normlessness" of heterosexual relationships in the 1960s a "sexual wilderness" as a opposed to the "sexual revolution"—a telling modification. Amongst the factors that Packard recognizes as changing the sexual landscape for young heterosexuals is the prevalence of technology in everyday lives. This caused the homes to shift "from being a production center to being a service station," in which "many homemakers are hard put to consider themselves fully employed unless they follow the models in the television ads and keep their floors and glassware gleaming, or unless they get heavily involved in chauffeuring children" (23).

with three possibilities for making further sales: You sell replacements; you sell more than one item to each family; or you dream up a new or improved product—or one that at least seems new or improved—that will enchant families that already own an 'old' model of your product" (12).[14] The cycle of persuasion, purchase, use, and disposal is self-perpetuating and seemingly never-ending. "New and improved" is an inevitable step in the process and the urgency presented alongside various products made families believe immediate ownership was imperative. In other words, growing families required (needed? merely desired?) the latest and best products—automobiles, refrigerators, furniture, clothing, televisions, and infant accoutrement—for their homes.[15] Production and use of these items required resources and energy, and once they were used up, they had to go somewhere.

But the cycle of consumption and waste did not merely relate to the production and sale of consumer products. It also applied to the move into the suburbs and the use of land. As families grew, they required space, and the move into the suburbs influenced how the actual landscape was transformed. In *The Squeeze*, published in 1960, Edward Higbee argues that suburbia, which has the one advantage of the "saving grace of space," "has put the city's rootless ones back in contact with their own pieces of the bulldozed land" (89). Without much irony, Higbee suggests:

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[14] Environmentalist Wendell Berry identifies the problem of consumption as such: "But our waste problem is not the fault only of producers. It is the fault of an economy that is wasteful from top to bottom—a symbiosis of an unlimited greed at the top and a lazy, passive, and self-indulgent consumptiveness at the bottom—and all of us are involved in it" (127). We are implicated in the processes of waste, from government to producer to consumer, and escaping this cycle of waste appears to be impossible. See also Kenneth Boulding's essay 1966 "The Economics of the Coming Spaceship Earth" for a discussion on the ecological implications of "closed" and "open" (or "spaceman" and "cowboy") economies.

[15] Historians have suggested that the prevalence of the automobile in the postwar period took courtship out of the home and into the back alleys, parking lots, and drive-in movies. The ubiquitous backset became a cultural marker of sexual awakening and initiation. This suggests, then, a further connection between heterosexual sex, technological progress and the resulting pollution.

> suburbia is essentially the nation's year-round residential nursery, riding high on the bottom of human multiplication and the protective instincts of parents who want to give their spawn a sporting chance. It is today's response to the age-old nesting urge which, from the beginning of time, has been the important business of living things. Newly married parents stick to fundamentals. Instinctively discounting world-shaking threats of holocaust each young couple seeks a plot of earth on which it may rear its own. That is the essence of suburbia's popularity. (89-90)

Here is the enactment of Hardin's "tragedy of the commons"—these newlyweds embody humanity's supposedly innate desire to possess and manipulate a piece of earth. From Higbee's point of view, the suburbs provided security for the "spawn" of the newlyweds. They also sought containment, to invoke Alan Nadel's phrase, both physical and psychological, away from the threat of nuclear holocaust and even diversity, since the "residential nursery" of the suburbs bred sameness and stagnancy. The focus here was on the children, their health and maintenance as well as their proliferation. The suburbs were built specifically to house these efficiently breeding couples and all of the stuff they brought with them or purchased while there.

The politically sanctioned (and culturally applied) policy of containment is the focus of Nadel's influential *Containment Culture*. Nadel argues that the idea that "[T]he American Cold War is a particularly useful example of the power of large cultural narratives to unify, codify, and contain—perhaps *intimidate*—the personal narratives of a population" (4). Nadel further suggests that certain narrow tropes do much of the work of perpetuating these larger narratives. These tropes are invasive and persistent, and

assist "narratives that by virtue of their repetition seem 'natural,' like clichés, and, like 'common sense,' refer to what everyone 'knows' is true" (8). Nadel's use of the term "natural" should not be taken for granted here. It represents a recognition that in the Cold War period certain cultural narratives came to be accepted as the standard and went for a time without serious questioning or revision. Acquiescence to narratives about sexuality and the environment indicated a larger moment of delusion. To normalize narratives of sexuality, i.e. heterosexuality within marriage as the only acceptable form of sexual expression, and of the environment, i.e. land and natural resources were limitless and exclusively existed for consumption by humans, means the foreclosure, or at least the quieting, of dissenting points of view. Significant to my project, Nadel uses the trope of the closet to describe "a nuclear gaze" which sought "the difference between dangerous and nondangerous activity, universal and specific jurisdiction, containment and proliferation" and resulted in a prohibition of "actions with ambiguous motives" (24). In these estimations, security is bound up in the nuclear gaze, obsessed with heteronormativity, domesticity, and the attainment of possessions without much examination of the environmental impact. Narratives of insecurity and apocalypse, then, centered on distrust of those who refused to participate in what May recognizes as the "civic duty" of consuming and reproducing. These dominant narratives, Nadel concludes, ultimately fail because the pairs within the marked binaries they reinforce are always aware of and dependent upon each other.

Despite the seemingly ubiquitous presence of the Mom, Pop and all the Little Ones and their tendency to waste, the discourse presented by these Cold War scholars reveals a telling dissension in the often-unquestioned dominance of the nuclear family of

popular imagination. For these reasons, I find the Cold War era a particularly fruitful period in which to investigate the intersections between America's population boom, the proliferation and establishment of the contained nuclear family, and the environmental problems that came about as a result of the population increase and the embrace of a consumer attitude. Despite the voices that spoke out against overpopulation and environmental damage and because of the need for security (whether real or imagined) in the postwar world, the nuclear family, headed by its heterosexual, companionate couple, remained the dominant paradigm of suitableness and social acceptability. Elaine Tyler May, in her influential *Homeward Bound*, aptly points out that procreation in Cold War America "symbolized hope for the future" as well as reinforced a heterosexual couple's participation and endorsement of "civic values" (120). Parents participated in what May calls "domestic containment" as a means of strengthening governmental and socially sanctioned narratives of "the consumer choice model" that in turn valued multiple children and copious consumption of products (140). Girding one's loins against the onslaught of communism and nuclear war is done through an embrace of social normativity and the purchase of goods. "A home filled with children would create a feeling of warmth and security against the cold forces of disruption and alienation," with sexual nonreproduction and homosexuality (though not necessarily the same thing) among these dangerous forces (17). May's suggestion that the "thwarted expectations" of parents often played into family planning is a significant one. Procreation was state sanctioned, in other words—acceptable *and* expected.

But the use of consumer products is not the only sort of environmental destruction that took place in the postwar period; the abuse of land was apparent and other natural

resources were widely affected too. Adam Rome's 2001 *The Bulldozer in the Countryside* addresses the questions of land use both historically and materially by tracing the roots of the environmental movement in America. He argues that the movement is a direct response to population growth, a rise in affluence, and the new construction techniques in construction experienced in the years after World War II. Rome demonstrates that the postwar housing and baby booms involved a seemingly endless, destructive method, wherein one's lifestyle encompassed all manner of environmental disruption, so that "the single-family home with a full complement of consumer goods had become the most common image of 'the American way of life.' Yet the image of a mass consumer culture could only become reality with mass production of housing" (37). "Because the cheapest and largest tracts of land lay at the urban fringe," suburban sprawl became primarily responsible for the leveling of wilderness spaces and landscapes, the disruption of natural flows of water, the pollution of groundwater from complex sanitary systems, and the demand for new energy sources, strip mining specifically. Sprawl also brought an onslaught of automobiles and the highways as well as other disposable household good into some considered untouched countryside (42). Rome aptly points out, suburban sprawl because of the "unprecedented demand of new families for space, the concern to smooth the return of veterans to civilian life, the fear of a postwar depression […] To preserve social order, to give the average work a chance to own property, to provide a healthy environment for children, and to stimulate the economy" (34). That means all aspects of this environmental destruction were socially and governmentally sanctioned. More people meant the need for more housing, leading to the destruction of more land and the use of more resources. As I see it, this correlation

between the proliferation of the nuclear family and the spread into "virgin" lands equals the recognition by queer ecocriticism of the destruction of natural resources and abuse of the land itself.

THE (UN)NATURALNESS OF BEING

Therefore, as the dominant narrative, heteronormativity served in this period as the only "natural" form of sexual expression, and the church, the government, and popular culture openly sanctioned and supported it. Its opposite in the binary, its "unnatural" twin, was homosexuality, and homosexuals were increasingly visible after the Second World War.[16] The open policing, punishment and persecution of homosexuals were some of the main reasons for their increased visibility, and the "threat" they posed to national security, the nuclear family, and the production-consumption narrative is significant to considerations of queer ecology.[17] Both queer theory and ecocriticism have something to contribute to this discussion of Cold War heteronormativity and environmental disaster. Queer ecology works to challenge the connection between homosexuality and unnaturalness at the same time it critiques the normalization of heterosexuality. Although the two phrases are not interchangeable, "normal" and "natural" share a deep-seated relationship with the interplay of the

[16] In fact, as Jonathan Ned Katz indicates, shortly after their invention, the terms "heterosexual" and "homosexual" both indicated pathologies in the early twentieth century. "Heterosexual" was invented to define *nonprocreative* sex between two people of the opposite sex. The debate about the term grew in the 1940s and 50s when "sex-liberals strove to expand the heterosexual ideal to include within the boundaries of the normal a wider-than-ever range of gender ideals and nonprocreative, premarital, and extramarital behavior" (96).

[17] Andil Gosine illustrates that "overpopulation" caused by the reproductive sex between non-white people and sex between men as a way of uncovering three elements of the discourse of hegemonic, white heteronormativity: "their commitment to projects of white nation-building; their use of linked arguments about public safety and morality to make claims about the dangers that non-white heterosexual and homosexual sex pose to nature; and their denial of the erotic, through their insistent nonrecognition of sexual desire and of sexual acts as pleasurable" (150).

nature/culture divide.

From the efforts to find the "gay gene" and consequently some biological explanation (justification?) for homosexuality to the religious and social debate about whether homosexuality is somehow "against nature," the idea of a normal or natural sexuality even exists reveals what is at the heart of the nature-culture debate in ecocriticism: whether or not the "natural world" even exists outside of the cultural construction.[18] Or, as Jeffrey Weeks points out, "Sexuality is as much about language as it is about the sexual organs" and the "paradox of sexual identities is that they are both artificial and essential, arbitrary but forceful, invented categories that nevertheless provide the basic directions by which we navigate the shoals of personal need and social relationships" (3, 5). Put another way, Roger N. Lancaster, addressing evolutionary psychology's attempts to "explain the emergence of supposedly universal human characteristics," makes this argument: "'Human nature,' it would seem, actually admits the most variegated of practices—even for those societies supposedly nearest the baseline of human origin stories. There is no reason to suppose that this splendid variety is not the real plotline of a plausible story of human evolution" (49, 51).[19] In other words,

[18] It is not my intention nor do I have the space here to trace the different distinctions between biology and culture. For discussions about the scientific attempts at uncovering the "gay gene" and questions about what "makes" people homosexual, see: Dean Hamer's *The Science of Desire: The Search for the Gay Gene and the Biology of Behavior*, Simon LeVay's *Queer Science: The Use and Abuse of Research into Homosexuality* and Timothy Murphy's *Gay Science: The Ethics of Sexual Orientation Research*. For a critique of biological determinism and the need to find a "gay gene," see Dorothy Nelkin's and M. Susan Lindee's "Creating Natural Distinctions." Additionally, for discussions about the prevalence of homosexual or queer behavior in the other-than-human world, see: Bruce Bagemihl's *Biological Exuberance: Animal Homosexuality and Natural Diversity* and Joan Roughgarden's *Evolution's Rainbow: Diversity, Gender, and Sexuality in Nature and People*. For a critique of the heterosexist tendencies in sexual studies of biology, see Bonnie B. Spanier's "'Lessons' from 'Nature': Gender Ideology and Sexual Ambiguity in Biology." Noreen Giffney's and Myra J. Hird's essay collection *Queering the Non/Human* also takes on the intersections of queerness, questions of normativity, and studies of the non-human.

[19] Weeks further explains that the cultural meanings of different sexualities and perceptions of sexualities are so diverse that "it is pointless discussing questions such as, what are the origins of homosexual oppression, or what is the nature of homosexual taboo, as it there was a single causative factor" (15).

perceptions of sexualities and of naturalness are always bound up in both constructed and intrinsic definitions, often having to do more with fear stemming from unfamiliarity than with any real threat.

What queer ecology works against is the intrinsic containment of either ecologies or sexualities. Katie Hogan argues for the existence of an "everyday eugenics" that

> often flows from protectionist discourses of nature and the environment, it is vital to analyze the ideologies and cultural myths informing representations of rural and urban nature and environments. Such work broadens our understanding of who and what deserves environmental freedom, so that queer bodies, sexualities, and cultures are seen as worthy of ecological and cultural protection on par with urban national parks and wilderness areas. (245) [20]

Protection is key here. The phobias that originate from anxiety of the uncontained, and the inestimable boundaries presented not just by the nature world but by queerness go a long way in revealing and enforcing the recognition of naturalized and normalized ways of being. The fear associated with both the wild, natural world and the "unnaturalness" of queerness stems from fear of the very spontaneity that makes the fluidity and reinterpretation of these definitions possible. For centuries in America, fear of the natural world stemmed from ideas of the wilderness, that space *out there*, the other than human, dark and unknown. The wilds—the forests and rivers, mountains and open plains—were a source of anxiety for some inhabitants and motivated them to attempt to actively

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Rather, Weeks suggests an interrogation the specific forms of the regulation of sexualities because this get at the heart of the debate over what caused some societies to accept homosexuality and others to police it.

[20] In "Sex at the Limits," an article about the normalizing discourse used in environmentalist thought, Catriona Sandilands highlights the way rhetoric about population management is tied into "globalizing environmentality, and that enrivonmentality is inextricably linked to capital" (90). This is reason, perhaps, that "if the problem of population is simply one of 'too many people', then why not encourage a greater variety of non-heterosexual, non-reproductive sexual practices?" (91).

contain that which was not human. Rigid definition of the natural world cannot and does not exist. The unpredictability of natural forces, e.g. the weather, makes certain that humans are constantly challenged in their approaches to containment.[21]

Likewise, queerness often resists definitive borders. Queerness's main characteristic is its flexibility and ability to take on varying features. Whether this involves non-normative (non-monogamous, non-heterosexual) or gay and lesbian sexualities, queerness represents a gamut of activities and identities that does not necessarily fit neatly within the nuclear family model of companionate marriage.[22] The distrust of that which is uncontrollable, i.e. the panic associated with the non-procreative "spread" of queerness and the relaxed barriers associated with openness of variable sexualities, is represented by queerness's permeable boundaries. Guy Hocquenghem's characterization of the fear of homosexual desire is "the *ungenerating-ungenerated* terror of the family, because it *produces itself without reproducing*. Every homosexual must thus see himself as the end of the species, the termination of a process for which he is not

[21] Bill McKibben's influential *The End of Nature* argues that the idea that nature "takes forever" is essentially incorrect. He cautions that this "reassuring sense of a timeless future" is a "delusion" (5). What McKibben is getting at is that we are speeding up the destruction of nature, and "[o]ur comforting sense of the permanence of our natural world, our confidence that it will change gradually and imperceptibly if at all" is a fatal mistake on our parts (7-8). McKibben echoes Rachel Carson's idea that time is scarce in the modern world and that "the contamination of man's total environment" offers just as much threat at nuclear warfare (*Silent Spring* 8). McKibben recognizes that invention of nuclear weaponry as the "beginning of the end of nature," because it gave humankind that ability to "overmaster nature, to leave an indelible imprint everywhere all at once" (66).

[22] Some scholars have even gone so far as to suggest that monogamy, defined as one individual mating exclusively with only one other individual, goes against human beings' "natural" state. David Barash's *The Myth of Monogamy* uses examples of promiscuity in the animal world in order to illustrate that there is no "natural" model for human's monogamous behaviors. Barash ultimately concludes, "there is no evidence, either from biology, primatology, or anthropology, that monogamy is somehow 'natural' or 'normal' for human beings," at the same time "human inclinations may be able to fit whatever matrimonial patterns exist in the society they happen to experience" (153). An interesting proposition, yes, but the major flaw in Barash's research lies in his reinforcement of the nature/culture split. Therefore, according to Barash, primates are animals, animals are symbols of the natural world, and primate are not monogamous, therefore the natural world does not support patterns of monogamy. There is much to be said for the normalizing and naturalizing effects of dominant, hegemonic culture, I think, and we should not ignore them in order to uncover patterns of "normalness" represented in the natural world. See also the more recent *Sex at Dawn: The Prehistoric Origins of Modern Sexuality* by Christopher Ryan and Cacilda Jetha.

responsible and which must stop at himself. […] The homosexual can only be a degenerate because he does not generate—he is only the artistic end to a species" (107-8, my emphases). That is, homosexuals (and queers) are threatening because they proliferate but not through the "natural" avenues of procreation. Moreover, the way Hocquenghem articulates a spatialization of homosexual temporality is through the idea of the "non-limitative horizontal relations" rather than the "hierarchical succession" that implies heterosexual reproduction (109). Erotophobia, homophobia, and ecophobia, all of which are defined briefly below, are all born from this exact narrative—the narrative of unrestrained and "messy" movement from one generation (i.e., creation) into the next.[23]

The "messiness" of the natural world and queer is manifested theorizations of queer ecocriticism, and before applying it in its critical scope, I lay the groundwork of the brief history of queer ecology's theoretical qualities. The thing that appears to link each theoretical framework centers on the idea of fear. The link between the devaluation and subordination of women, nature, and queers is one of the discourses that rule on heteronormativity, and it affects the ways in which narratives about the environment and sexuality are conveyed. Greta Gaard, in "Toward a Queer Ecofeminism," suggests that a "democratic, ecological society envisioned as the goal of ecofeminism will, of necessity, be a society that values sexual diversity and the erotic" (22). Gaard argues that a regularized valuation of masculinized and normative human desires over natural

[23] Another contemporary commentary on sexuality and its "naturalness" lies in John McPartland's 1947 *Sex in Our Changing World*. McPartland identifies the "prime functions" of human sexuality, with the desire to produce children foremost amongst them. Birth control, McPartland argues, disrupts these perfectly "natural" functions and replaces them with "pseudofunctions": "physical satisfaction, the gratification of an emotionally erotic complex which may be principally infantile, and an artificially evaluated form of the third prime function—that of selection and competition" (110, 111). His further argument that birth control produces a "third sex"—"women who are sexually desirable, but who do not bear children"—echoes the rhetoric of homosexuality as being a third gender (111).

processes has resulted in the subordination of a feminized and sexualized earth. The subordination justifies erotophobia, which in turn reinforces the "natural/unnatural dichotomy." Gaard notices that "[a]ttempts to naturalize one form of sexuality function as attempts to foreclose investigation of sexual diversity and sexual practices and gain control of the discourse on sexuality," making these attempts at naturalization the manifestation of combined homophobia and erotophobia (29).

Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands takes Gaard's concept of erotophobia one step further by relating it "to the regulation of sexual diversity; normative heterosexuality, especially in its links to science and nature, has the effect of regulating and instrumentalizing sexuality, linking it to truth and evolutionary health rather than to pleasure and fulfillment" ("Desiring Nature" 180). Suggesting a solution to the issue of erotophobia, Sandilands sees touch as "non-teleological, more part of a disruption than a continuation. As a central practice of an erotogenic ethics, touch is both transgressive and creative. […] it ignites a knowledge of the other that is profoundly different from vision" (186). Erotophobia, then, denies other modes of physical contact by possessing a preoccupation with a death that can be remedied by procreation. The "de-eroticization" and "heterosexualization" of both the human and natural world, according to Mortimer-Sandilands, is the chief obstruction to free sexual expression, and the solution is an emphasis on *touch*, "an erotics of play, spontaneity, and disruption" in which "teleology gives way to unpredictability, and a naturalized normative heterosexual penetration to a desire to multiply queer the everyday world of tactile sensibility" (187).[24] This emphasis

[24] Connecting this spontaneity to the natural world, Chaia Heller identifies a "principle of differentiation" that constitutes "a "flexibility, spontaneity, and creativity which allows organisms to deviate from established patterns or norms" (126). The principle, one of the elements of the "eco-erotic," moves toward a "process of spontaneous complexification" that emphasizes a process of becoming (127). Beings do not

on touch without reproduction and the currency of the deployment of touch introduces the possibilities of a complex matrix of desire. Queer touch, that is, touch that does not result in reproduction, is concurrent with the instability and volatility of nature, featuring possibilities outside the paradigm of what is considered "natural" and "unnatural."

Additionally, Simon Estok suggests a study of ecophobia, which is related to homophobia in the recognition that "ecophobia is rooted in and dependent on anthropocentric arrogance and speciesism, on the ethical position that humanity is outside of and exempt from the laws of nature" (217). I would argue that much of this "anthropocentric arrogance" is tied into a widespread naturalization of consumption and reproduction, which not only assumes that a consumer lifestyle and the production of offspring is desirable, logical, and normal but also often ignores the environmental impact and strain put upon resources which is directly formed by the aspiration to own stuff and make the future generations which consumer and reproduce in an endless cycle. But an easy equation between heterosexuality/ procreation/ overpopulation/ environmental destruction and homosexuality/ non-procreation/ population control/ environmental friendliness is decidedly not the answer. Instituting these binaries is not only counterproductive to the project of queer ecocriticism because it is too confining but it is also destructive. Opening up enquiries requires *opening*. Rigid divisions between people who procreate and those who do not or cannot draw false lines between the "right" acting environmental players and those who do not control their procreation. Ecocriticism has already identified a politics of becoming, a productive and creative means of reproducing without reproduction. Becoming erases the restrictive boundaries

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then have to reproduce through traditional means, i.e. vaginal penetration. Becoming, then, is the continuing process by which queerness is linked with the spontaneity and possibility of the natural.

of heteronormativity at the same time it does not fully foreclose those possibilities.

One way of opening up enquiries is through literary criticism. For decades, ecocriticism and queer theory have been used separately as points through which to examine literature, and the move to unite them ensures promising readings in the future. But up to now, there have been few extensive studies of queer ecocriticism and its applicability as literary criticism, leaving a large gap in the nascent theory's treatment. For this reason, I reveal the tropes that make a literary reading using queer ecocriticism possible. The most basic element of a queer ecological reading, as I have already illustrated, comes down to challenging the naturalization and normalization of certain dominant, cultural narratives and the institution of fear of otherness. The means of achieving this general questioning of normalized and naturalized narratives are diverse, and the main expression comes in the valorization or at least acknowledgement of the legitimacy of other forms of sexuality that fall outside of the model of monogamous, heterosexual activities that results in reproduction. One way of imagining alternative modes of creative reproduction is through recognition of family and social units that deviate from the standard nuclear model.[25]

A queer ecocritical reading also takes into account not just homosexual behaviors,

[25] In fact, Margaret Mead, in a chapter entitled "Our Complex American Culture," makes an important observation: experiences are so diverse within American families that we cannot and should not draw definitive lines about genuine or expected American familial experience. No two families behave alike nor have the same habits and opinions nor does the child "see any such harmonious, repetitive behaviour" (251). In other words, when it comes to families, diversity and difference appear to be the norm. Further, Mead observes, "The behaviour of each American is itself a composite, an imperfectly realized version, of the behaviour of many voices and many ways, not a single model—expressed in many voices and many ways, but still a single model—but a hundred models, each an individually developed style, lacking the authenticity, the precision, of a group style" (252). Lacking in "precision" and "authenticity," according to Mead, the American family takes whatever form it sees fit. Mead's evaluation of the American self as a multi-layered and many-voiced amalgamation echoes not just the American melting-pot, an idiom widely accepted in popular thought, but also the idea that the institution of the family, the family unit itself, functions (or should function) in much the same way—as a unit with a hundred examples on which to model itself (or from which to deviate and redefine) rather than a singular one.

which are most closely associated with the term queerness, but also heterosex that does not necessarily result in procreation. Play, touch, and erotic contact fall into this category because, as mentioned above, they suspend the boundaries between varied and separate experiences. Also under consideration here are homosocial associations, those relationships that might foreclose heterosexuality but do not inevitably result in sexual activity. Queerness's fluidity lends itself to the readings of the varying modes of sexuality, and at the same time considerations of ecocriticism, which examines the interdependency between the human and other-than-human worlds, can easily dissolve rigid definitions.

Because queer ecocritical readings acknowledge the presence and acceptability of the modes outside of heterosexual reproduction and sometimes even question the necessity of reproduction, there is an acknowledged diminution in the valorization of the production of biological children. Queer ecocriticism's concern with children centers on the rigidity of the pattern of reproduction and futurism.[26] The cyclical motion of birth-marriage-reproduction-death signifies a "natural" sequence, but it is also restrictive in many ways. The heteronormative, dominant narratives value stability and constancy, a constant motioning toward the future. In 1949's *Male and Female*, Margaret Mead identifies the American family's tendency to look toward the future, "towards what the children may become, not towards a perpetuation of the past of the stabilization of the

[26] For evidence of this turn toward reproductive futurism in the mainstream environmental movement, one only need to look at PSAs designed to urge people to "save the planet" for the "sake of the children" or "future generations." Perhaps this is possibly the only way the environmental movement can appeal to the mainstream—through their guilt as not only stewards of the earth in charge of preserving for the sake of the future but also as people who *should* be producing the people who will populate the future. It is, if nothing else, a vicious cycle. See also Noel Sturgeon's "'The Power is Yours, Planeteers!': Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Children's Environmentalist Popular Culture" or the more recent "Penguin Family Values: The Nature of Planetary Environmental Reproductive Justice" for an insightful discussion about how heterocentrist (and racist) rhetoric underlies popular children's entertainment through naturalized roles for men and women and a narrow definition of family.

present" (253). These children will "repeat the parental way of life," continuing the cycle of marriage and childbearing with very little variation since "we can follow with fair accuracy the picture of this assumed development—the recommended, applauded, underlined pattern" (253, 263). This is an attitude echoed by Lee Edelman's 2004 *No Future*, an oft-debated study about queerness's connection to the death drive. Edelman calls for an inquiry into a "reproductive futurism" in which the "Child remains the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the fantasmic beneficiary of every political intervention" (2-3).[27] The Child is for Edelman an archetype, "an erotically charged investment in the rigid sameness of identity that is central to the compulsory narrative of reproductive futurism" (21). The problem for queers in this equation is that "*queerness* names the side of those *not* 'fighting for the children,' the side outside the consensus by which all politics confirms the absolute value of reproductive futurism" (3). Edelman's oppositionality is not without issues, but it does point out one essential element of queer ecocriticism to my mind: the fixation is not on reproduction for the sake of inheritance.

Therefore, a queer ecocritical temporality does not necessarily foreclose the future

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[27] Tim Dean, in his critique of Edelman's *No Future*, suggests the origins of the notion of creative becoming, queerness's answer to the restrictions of nonreproduction, lie in the multiplicity of Deleuze and Guattari's conception of the rhizome:

> Whereas the latter insists that every notion of futurity remains hostage to heteronormativity, Deleuze elaborates through the concept of becoming what might be called a queer notion of futurity. As a ceaseless movement of being that is not coordinated by teleology or development, *becoming* never results in anything resembling an identity. In the process of differentiating becoming from evolution (and hence from the whole problematic of reproduction), Deleuze and Guattari characterize it in terms of 'creative involution': Becoming entails not reproduction—reproducing in the future a version of what exists in the present—but what might be called nonreproductive, nonapocalyptic invention. (135)

In adopting this model of becoming, queerness is not necessarily implicated in non-(re)production; rather, queerness comes to signify the possibility of (re)production without the destruction and control implicated in heteronormativity and the cycle of production-consumption. Another study that takes on Edelman's argument and states that queer theory should look toward the future is José Esteban Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*.

but rather values temporalities outside this consideration. Consequently, sanctioned reproduction and the contingent ecological destruction often generated by the hubris of human dominance, succession, and consumption runs counter to the idea of "queer time" as having creative solutions to the birth, marriage, reproduction, death narrative. Namely, I adopt Judith Halberstam's notions of queer time, which she argues "develop, at least in part, in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction" (1). [28] Queer time is in direct opposition to "family time" or "repro-time," a temporality that emphasizes not only the endless cycling and scheduling of daily life that revolves around children (as well as the work needed to support those children) but also the "time of inheritance" which "refers to an overview of generational time within which values, wealth, goods, and morals are passed through family ties from one generation to the next" (5).[29] Repro-time is invested in an almost unchanging cycle of birth, courtship, marriage, child-rearing and death that is constantly accounting for and looking toward the future, i.e. children, as the *natural* route for humans to take. Interesting, Halberstam also identifies the way heteronormative models of time are bound up in the possession of products and the constancy of one's influence over the next generation. It is a restrictive

[28] Regarding the issue of queer families and reproduction/adoption by gay and lesbian couples, Valerie Lehr cautions that the "politics of inclusion" uncovers "norms that are embedded in family ideology have been continually present as a divisive force": "Only by understanding conflicts—such as whether homosexuality is a natural, essential part of the self; how gender and sexuality are connected; and whether monogamy and maturity are linked—are connected to dominant constructions of appropriate family can we begin to move beyond them, offering instead a different vision of self, relationships, and politics centered on creating neither a unified gay family nor private families" (44).

[29] According to Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, "The disciplinary methods reveal a linear time whose moments are integrated, one upon another, and which is orientated towards a terminal, stable point; in short, an 'evolutive' time. But it must be recalled that, at the same moment, the administrative and economic techniques of control reveal a social time of a serial, orientated cumulative type: the discovery of an evolution in terms of 'progress'" (160). I find this quite ironic in imagining the restrictive sense of linear time. In a similar vein, Baudrillard states, "It is evident that objects are never offered for consumption in absolute disorder. They may, in certain cases, imitate disorder the better to seduce, but they are always arranged to mark out directive paths, to orientate the purchasing impulse towards *networks* of objects in order to captivate that impulse and bring it, in keeping with its own logic, to the highest degree of commitment, to the limits of its economic potential" (27). Consumerism, then, is bound up in a similar linear narrative of time.

sense of inheritance, to say the least. Queer time, then, is not progressive, moving toward an objective and fixating on the forward motion into the future; it is shiftier than that. It does not restrict the same way Halberstam's repro-time or the ever-cycling narrative of production-consumption confine. It allows for an accumulation of time unconcerned with an end result.[30]

The other oppressive narrative that queer ecology critiques is that of the cycle of production-consumption. It is a restrictive and recurring system of use, abuse and waste. In a very real sense, this is the system that is implicated in much of the environmental destruction that occurred after the Second World War. Steven Miles argues there was "not merely a consumer society, but a consumer *culture*" in the Post-Fordist period (9). The distinction Miles makes between society and culture emphasizes that after World War II, "consumption no longer appeared to be determined by the producer. On the contrary, the producer was increasingly subject to the demands and tastes of the consumer" (9). The production-consumption of the postwar period correlates with the booms in both population and the economy after World War II.[31]

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[30] Although Dianne Chisholm's *Queer Constellations* is about queer urban spaces and the use of city sites for the deployment of queer desire primarily, I find her adoption of Benjamin's dialectical in the form of what she calls "queer constellations" useful. Queer constellations are "dialectical images" that emerge through "literary montage, the flaneur and flanerie, the boheme, allegory, porosity, topographical memory, and monadology" (10). These images, Chisholm explains, "[i]nstead of punctuating the narrative of progress they blast it apart, reassembling fragments of collective history into dialectical images" as well as "[s]mashing dominant narrative and dominated space into montage" (30). Accordingly, queer constellations introduce the importance of fragmentation and reassembly, of physical spaces and fluidity, and of destroying often oppressive narratives of, in this case, heteronormativity.

[31] Jean Baudrillard views the cycle in a slightly different way. He emphasizes the consumer's desire to not just demand products and use them up but also to create something wholly different in the process of use:

> The consumer society needs its objects in order to be. More precisely, it needs to *destroy* them. The use of objects leads only to their *dwindling disappearance*. The value created is much more intense in *violent loss*. This is why destruction remains the fundamental alternative to production: consumption is merely an intermediate term between the two. There is a profound tendency within consumption for it to surpass itself, to transfigure itself in destruction. (47, emphases in original)

Baudrillard does not see consumption as the end result of production. Rather, the destruction of consumer items only highlights their usefulness as things *able* to be destroyed and disposed of. Baudrillard's

But queer ecology also acknowledges the impact and effect of *all* people on the Earth.[32] It is not just reproductive couples that inhabit and utilize the planet but queers as well. Therefore, I do not suggest that queers are somehow instilled with some mystical or exclusive knowledge about the environment; rather, they might be more likely to recognize the management of space, and in particular natural spaces, because of their status as outsiders. Consequently, an essential part of the policing of queer sexuality is the creation of specific spaces into which the oppressed are thrust. While these spaces are produced as a way of keeping queerness away from the eyes of mainstream propriety and also of maintaining control, queers often adopt and adapt these spaces for their own ends. In establishing and adopting spaces for their own occupation, as Gordon Brent Ingram argues, queers can institute possibilities for liberation and community-building, "at least in terms of greater visibility, some increase in freedom of behaviour, and the lowering of perceived risk of assault or other forms of repression" (95). Specifically, Ingram refers to outdoor space as particularly strategic to queers because it is "almost a home, because there are few other places to go" (101).[33] Ingram further suggests that as a

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recognition of the "dwindling disappearance" and "violent loss" of consumer goods is an essential part of gauging the attitude with which consumers engage with products. For my purposes, however, I adopt the phrase "production-consumption" to describe the phenomenon of a cyclical and ultimately environmentally unsound practice.

[32] On the question of what queer ecology should "do," Timothy Morton remarks on how "[I]nstead of reducing everything to sameness, ecological interdependence multiplies differences everywhere" ("Guest Column" 277). Also, "[q]ueer ecology would go to the end and show how beings exist precisely because they are nothing but relationality, deep down—for the love of matter" (277).

[33] Several authors (like Lillian Faderman and George Chauncey, amongst others) have written histories detailing the adoption and use of urban spaces for the establishment of gay and lesbian communities. During the 1970s, with the rise of the feminist movement, the "Back to Land" movement drew lesbians into rural spaces in an attempt to live outside of mainstream, patriarchal and consumer-driven American society. See specifically Sandilands, "Lesbian Separatist Communities" in which she argues: "Some women have actively appropriate a normative idea of 'nature' for a lesbian sexuality societally deemed 'unnatural'; For others, this has involved carving out an idea of 'natured' female sexuality in defiance of what they seen as n urban-masculine patriarchal sexuality. The demarcation of a land as lesbian only has created for others a safe space for outdoor sexual activities that would be extremely risky elsewhere; some emphasized the affirming importance of a nature space where lesbians could have sex in semipublic without the risk of violence, and others saw outdoor sex as a particular way of connecting with nature. Indeed some women

science, landscape ecology offers insight into the cultural dimensions of ecosystems. For this reason, it is important to consider landscape ecology's particular vocabulary and its relationship to the formation of communities. Borrowing from that vocabulary, Ingram suggests a term such as "connectivity represents various flows of nutrients, disturbances, organisms, and even language, concepts, and cultural practices, that shift across the landscape at various scales" while a "matrix is the most connective set of elements, habitat, and social practices (or lack of practices) that span and touch on territories and aspects of particular landscapes and neighborhoods" ("Fragments, Edges, and Matrices" 263). The terms Ingram invokes here echo the idiom of queer theory. But this "cooperation" between nature and queers should not be assumed to be utopic; rather, the it is the recognition that particular outdoor spaces and other environments are specifically adopted for the transgression of normative behavior that is important. It is another human use of the natural world, but indeed a more changeable and libratory one.

QUEER ECOLOGY AS CRITICISM

These aforementioned tropes—an acceptance and valorization of other-than-heteronormative sexualities, an open acknowledgement of alternative families, temporalities that fall outside of a restrictive sense of futurity and inheritance, a critique of the cycle of production-consumption, a recognition of the environmental damage done by careless human breeding as well as the establishment of queer spaces in which to live out and enable queer desires–all contribute to a queer ecocritical reading of literature. The literature of the 1960s, the work from the decade subsequent to the beginning of the

actively eroticized the land itself and saw sex as an important environmental practice alongside organic gardening" (19).

Baby Boom and consumer revolution of the 1940s and 1950s, is a rich point from which to view these concepts of queer ecology. I draw my literary analyses from this time period because this is the beginning of the full critique of the heteronormative, over-consumptive and ecological destructive way of life. If the time immediately after the war is commonly thought of as a period of unprecedented growth and the acquiescence to the dominant narratives of the nuclear family and production-consumption, then the 1960s is generally remembered for its relatively rebellious spirit, a time for children raised in the comforts of the suburbs to mature and break out of the restrictions of their middle-class families. I mention this not because there was no valuable work done to revise the dominant narratives before the 1960s but rather because the 1960s so often encapsulates much of what this project is about—a break from heteronormativity and a recognition of the environmental danger of too much consumption.

I have chosen texts that have been commonly read through the critical lens of gender studies, queer theory, or ecocriticism, so part of my project lies in reclaiming these texts for more complex readings which combine these emphases. Christopher Isherwood's *A Single Man* (1964), Ken Kesey's *Sometimes a Great Notion* (1964), Jane Rule's *Desert of the Heart* (1964), and Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman* (1969) engage with issues surrounding sexuality and the environment and challenge the dominant narratives of heteronormativity and overuse of the natural world. Each novel issues its own paradigm of naturalness, emphasizing the term's fluidity across texts but its restrictedness within. I focus particularly on how each novel challenges not only the mainstream acknowledgment of heteronormativity but also the accepted destruction of the natural world by those who conform to the dominant narratives. That is not to

suggest, however, that any of the novels achieve a strictly environmentalist tone which places the other-than-human world above all others. Rather, the natural world is always at the behest of human manipulation. Nature, as it exists in the varying novels, exists only for the operation of human thought and action.

By examining sexual relationships between characters and the way they engage with the natural world, I arrive a multi-layered reading of the novels' connections with my own queer ecological interpretation. Queerness is represented by homosexual and homosocial relationships, fluidity of time and processes, and alternative lifestyles that work to dismiss the dominant narrative of marriage, childbearing, and consumption. Likewise, the natural world, represented in multiple ways, stands as an entity separate from the humans in the novels. It manifests a variableness that should not be seen as vulnerability but as a reflection of queerness's break with the evitable and restrictive cycling of repro-time. That is not to suggest that the natural world does not adhere to the dictates of natural cycles (the seasons, the days, etc.) but that in its fluidity it manifests a power in and of itself. Additionally, the natural world represents a consistent immovability, a force that will not and cannot permanently disappear. The apocalyptic visions of these novels are represented not only in the nuclear narratives of the Cold War but in the overall durability of the natural world and its conditions.

In the chapter on Christopher Isherwood's *A Single Man*, I show how George, the novel's main character, acts a barometer for the ecological destruction enacted by the "breeders"—the families and their children—who surround him. While mourning the sudden death of his longtime partner, George observes the suburban heterosexual couples and their offspring as well as the rampant growth and construction, and the general

environmental destruction occurring in California at the time. While the novel is traditionally read as a text that empowers and normalizes a gay man in a long-term relationship, I argue that these critics are ignoring the environmental signs spread throughout the novel. George notices the urban and suburban sprawl occurring in California, and he realizes that the sprawl (and humans) will die and "the desert, which is the natural condition of this country, will return" (*A Single Man* 111). Isherwood specifically uses his gay character to track the inevitable apocalypse that will be brought on by breeding and reverses the paradigm of queerness as unnatural by making reproduction unnatural and inherently apocalyptic. Besides this, George constructs spaces to support his queerness. And instead of imposing new binaries in the narrative, Isherwood includes descriptions of touch and play, primarily that between George and his student Kenny, as a means of dissolving boundaries and opening upon the possibility of naturalized same-sex eroticism.

While Isherwood uncovers the destructive nature of heterosexual coupling through his frankly homosexual character, Ken Kesey uses homosociality to dismantle heteronormative domesticity and the systems that enforce mandatory heterosexual masculinity for men who live and work in logging communities. Kesey's *Sometimes a Great Notion*, the author's second novel, has not received the critical attention afforded to his first novel, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, despite the novels' similarity of being centered on a robust, authoritative male personality. I explore the deep and abiding homosociality present in the story of the Stamper family, a logging clan in Oregon. I frame my argument about the homosocial activities of communities of male loggers in the Northwest by showing that prescribed ideas of masculinity and manliness do not

necessarily (always) presuppose heterosexual activity. The primary homosocial relationships in the novel occur between Joe Ben and Hank Stamper (despite the fact they are both married) as well as Hank and his brother Leland. Kesey uses these relationships to disassemble and discount the presence of heterosexuality and reproduction in the novel, which actually carries over into a covert reading of the novel's ecofeminist tendencies. While the logging men's physical displays are often read by critics as Kesey's way of reinscribing the macho, pioneering mentality into a modern American literature populated by flaccid and weak men, I read these moments erotically, underscoring their occurrence in the space of the forest as necessary to the enactment of homosociality. Since the Stampers engage in clear cutting forests, it is impossible to read their relationship to the natural world as one of conservation; rather, they utilize the space of the forest in order to create a narrative of homosocial community. Here, nature must be cleared to make way for alternative communities. Also, through descriptions of the rising river, Kesey emphasizes human being's ultimate inability to control and police nature, which in turns dismantles the notion of naturalized human dominance.

My next chapter moves from the forests of the Pacific Northwest into the desert of Reno, Nevada. Jane Rule's *Desert of the Heart* centers on Evelyn, an English professor who travels to Reno to seek a divorce from her husband. While there, she meets, falls in love, and has a sexual relationship with a young woman named Ann. Despite Evelyn's admission that the younger Ann makes her feel like a "mother," the two have multiple sexual encounters, which simultaneously confirms and erases this familial relationship. There are many forms of family present in Rule's novel, making creative alternatives to parentage and childbearing present and valuable. Like *A Single Man*, *Desert of the Heart*

contains moments of play and touching which seek to reinforce the importance of sexual exploration across seeming boundaries as well as to normalize and bolster same-sex relationships. Rule establishes an alternative ecology here, focusing on how elements of in a biological system interrelate. Also, as with Isherwood's novel, the current criticism on *Desert of the Heart* tends to highlight the politics of Ann and Evelyn's lesbian relationship. While the focus on the sexual politics of the lesbian relationship is not remiss, it ignores the fundamental environmental factors that Rule includes, as Stacy Alaimo points out in her pivotal criticism of the novel. It is the Nevada landscape that often affords the pair the freedom to escape and love without the policing eye of the casino in which Ann works, the other women who live on the divorce ranch, or the many men who wish to claim their affections. Mortimer-Sandilands sees in the novel "a strong advocacy for a heightened perception of nature that blends an awareness of the difficulties of forging a home-place for queer individuals and communities, with a strong interest in the biotic communities in which such home-places take particular shape and meaning" ("Queer Ecocultural Studies" 461). To these ends, Rule equates the barrenness of the desert with the couple's animality, revising the narrative of ecological barrenness by including in the couple's rich and totally naturalized love affair. The desert is already queer, fluid and able to absorb definitions created by its visitors and inhabitants. And it is the desert's barrenness, a characteristic often inscribed with the negativity of non-production that allows the couple to create their own definitions of eroticism and naturalness.

Moving from the explicitly lesbian to a less explicit female queerness, my final chapter addresses the naturalized notions of womanhood and domesticity in Margaret

Atwood's *The Edible Woman*. In her first novel, Atwood presents the narrative of Marian, a woman in rebellion again her fiancée Peter and his control. On the surface, Marian buys into the heteronormative narrative of marriage and childbirth, but her body tells her otherwise. What occurs in *The Edible Woman* is a series of strange bodily incidents in Marian—she runs (read: escapes) senselessly from her fiancée, retreats into the "womb symbol," the space beneath the bed, finds her tongue and stomach turning against her as she is increasingly unable to eat, and then enacts another escape from her future husband. All of these things add up to a rebellion against marriage and the consumerism tied up to it. Ironically, Marian works for a company that surveys housewives on new commercial products, and the company becomes Atwood's symbol of the trap of heteronormative marriage and consumerism. While the novel is often read as a proto-feminist novel in which Marian is punished with anorexia, which is forced upon her by narcissistic men and patriarchy in general, and then "fights back" with the cannibalization of a cake shaped like a woman, I read the novel as a critique of not only the marriage system and a narrative that reinforces the Mother as the Ultimate Woman (embodied in the novel by the perverse, pregnant and unmarried Ainsley and the married, reproductive and distracted Clara) but also a forced and destructive system of "Production-consumption." As Duncan, a graduate student and acquaintance of Marian, explains, production-consumption is a system that forces its unnatural food products on consumers and forces them into an unending, self- and environmentally destructive cycle. It is in this novel that the indict of the cycle of production-consumption is most evident. I read Marian's gradual starvation as a deliberate challenge to the rotundity and productiveness of pregnancy, just as her multiple escapes back into womb spaces (the

bed, the bathroom, the subway) signal a retrogressive sense of time. Ultimately, Marian falls for Duncan, a man who claims, "I'm not a human at all" and hates the endless cycle of time since "it's a treadmill, even ironing, you iron the damn things and then you wear them and they get all wrinkled again" (152, 154). Marian's refusal to eat is a direct refusal of the shape and curves of ideal womanhood, and her queerness comes in the form of the boy-shaped body.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the importance of recovering both these particular novels as well as literary work from the 1960s in general. These works complicate the meaning of the nuclear family and its wasteful ways in a period characterized by its relationship to socially sanctioned narratives of waste and want. In reclaiming these texts from their exclusively queer or ecocritical readings and placing them at the intersection of both modes of literary analysis, I present a multifaceted line of criticism that seeks out the acknowledgement that queer studies and ecocriticism have things to lend each other. Although Isherwood, Kesey, Rule, and Atwood are often read and remembered by the literary community, they are not acknowledged as much for the texts that I have chosen. Often these texts seem to lie at the crossroads of varying movements and analyses so to my mind, queer ecocriticism provides a fascinating and versatile lens through which to engage with each novel. Additionally, the 1960s is remembered by most scholars as important for its political and pop cultural, or more a time of serious political and sociological movements balanced by the flourishing of the music, television and the film industries. Often, the literature of the 1960s is not given its full consideration. As I illustrate in the following chapters, the literature of the 1960s is rife with its own political and cultural importance, as its lies at the intersection of queer studies and ecocriticism.

CHAPTER I

"WARM BLOOD AND LIVE SEMEN AND RICH MARROW AND WHOLESOME FLESH!": THE COMING APOCALYPSE IN CHRISTOPHER ISHERWOOD'S *A SINGLE MAN*

> There are times when the change without apparent direction, and the growth without control, give the appearance of a socially acceptable madness, of a human population irruption that may well end tragically both for the people and for the land.
>
> —Raymond Dasmann, *The Destruction of California*
>
> Only connect…—E. M. Forster, *Howards End*
>
> We are caught…in the iron treads of a technological juggernaut. A mindless machine. With a breeder reactor for a heart.
>
> —Edward Abbey, *The Monkey Wrench Gang*

In the "Mr. Lancaster" section of Christopher Isherwood's 1962 novel *Down There on a Visit*, Mr. Lancaster explains that his assistant cannot make a party because "[h]is wife's expecting another baby. Her fifth. They breed like vermin. That's the real menace of the future, Christopher. Not war. Not disease. Starvation. They'll spawn themselves to death. I warned them, backed in '21. Wrote a long letter to *The Times*, forecasting the curve of the birth rate. I've been proved right already. But they were afraid. The facts were too terrible" (26). Lancaster's Malthusian warning, dating back to '21, has gone ignored by the larger population, particularly the media, which is indicative of the larger attitude toward the population "problem." Later in the novel, Ambrose, a

gay man who reminds Christopher of "one of Shakespeare's exiled kings," describes his imaginary, utopian homosexual "kingdom." It is a space where gay men will be free to express themselves openly at the same time heterosexuality will become unacceptable, and heterosexuals will be kept in spaces on the margins, reserved for "people like that" (100).[1] Ambrose's kingdom will also be useful to women since they will "be beautifully looked after on the breeding farms, as wards of the State. And, surely, most of them would greatly prefer artificial insemination, anyway. It's quite obvious that they have no real interest in men" (100). This, Ambrose explains, is because "Women are all Lesbians, really—they take naturally to all the ineffectual feminine messing about—cuddling and petting" (101). Even if Ambrose's vision is sexist, it reveals an underlying agenda—to combat heterosexism specifically by corralling women and curbing their reproduction.

Combined, these passages demonstrate the complexity of a queer ecological ethos in Isherwood's work. Heterosexual coupling is inherently risky, tending toward apocalypticism because the people who "breed like vermin" create pressure on valuable natural resources, particularly food. That Isherwood's brand of apocalypticism stems from problems created by the breeding of human beings within the dangerous and volatile nuclear family rather than the ever-present Cold War threat of nuclear war is telling. Reproductive sex is, essentially, the end of mankind, and the destruction of the environment directly correlates to the production of children. There is, for these childbearing couples, no future (to invoke Edelman's phrase) because they will surely kill themselves—and everyone else—off from too much reproduction. Isherwood infuses the

[1] Notice the interesting co-option and revision by Isherwood of the epithet often leveled at homosexuals. To be "like that" is a phrase often applied to homosexuals in order to differentiate and marginalize them.

heterosexual sex act with the power to create a generalized apocalypse, wiping away all life on the planet. At the same time though, heterosex, at the fault of the woman, is entirely stripped of any physical eroticism, making heterosexual acts purely reproductive and not pleasurable in any way. The particular reading of queer ecology I present in this chapter is primarily concerned with the valuing of homosexual male relationships over any other kind. For this reason, Isherwood is also preoccupied with the creation of a queer space that overturns heterosexism and homophobia in order to open up queer, erotic possibility, establish zones of safety for queerness, and expose ecological destruction.

The reason I begin my chapter on Isherwood's 1964 novel *A Single Man* with this mention of *Down There on a Visit* is because the passages highlight important features of my own queer ecological reading of the later novel. *A Single Man*, which follows George, a gay, middle-aged, English professor who has recently lost his partner, Jim, in an automobile accident, through twenty-four hours of his life, focuses on the prevalent themes of queer ecology. In its own way, the novel naturalizes queerness and makes it "ordinary" through George's conventionality and respectability. But rather than replacing a heteronormative paradigm with a naturalized sexuality, Isherwood remains ambivalent towards humans' ability to surmount or escape death, or more specifically, the past or future, in any way. According to reviewer Alan Pryce-Jones, Isherwood's "coherent philosophy" involves the "feebleness of our nature" and the knowledge that "we are going to be wiped up in a towel and poured down the sink anyway. Our loves, whether unorthodox or no, will not last, cannot save, deserve scant sympathy" (5). Using Isherwood's oft-cited phrase "I am a camera," another reviewer sees the middle-aged

George as "in that container, the once glittering camera, its bellows broken, its metal rusted, its lens dusty, cracked, and blind" ("Time Exposure" 77). While I do not agree that George is "blind" in the sense that he is unable to "see" what is occurring around, I do contend that there is a certain amount of wrath under which George operates which colors his critiques.

That Isherwood uses the gay George to critique the dominant narrative of the naturalness of heterosexuality and its acceptance of environmental devastation is not coincidental. Rather, he possesses the visionary ability to observe the subjugated since, as Isherwood himself asserts, *A Single Man* is not exclusively about homosexuality but "about minorities. And the homosexuals are used as a sort of metaphor for minorities in general" (Wickes 44). In particular, Isherwood's admission emphasizes what I see as a queer ecological examination of heterosexist, anti-nature, and anthropocentric control over the marginalized. George displays an attachment to the idea of minorities, which I will discuss later in the chapter, but it is something worth noting here. George's privileging of certain narratives, namely his stereotyping of racial and ethnic minorities, reflects his deep investment in containing these minority groups. That is, despite George's idealization of Mexicans and African-Americans namely, he contains them within a neat, definitive space of their own, separate from his queer sphere. The emphasis here must be and is on the homosexual minority.[2]

In fact, through the creation and maintenance of queer spaces in the novel,

[2] It is perhaps also worth noting that Isherwood sees George's status as an English immigrant and his age—his mid-fifties—as other reasons for his minority status. Imagining being put away into to "some beautifully ordered nursery-community where Senior Citizens […] are eased into senility," George finds an easy equation between "old" and the racial epithets of "kike" and "nigger" (34). George's still-active imagination visualizes a senior citizens' home that allows its residents to "screw, if they can still cut the mustard; and if they can't, let them indulge without inhibitions in *babylike erotic play*" (34, my emphasis). The connection between age and eroticism is telling—Isherwood appears to be connecting age and eroticism as a way of reversing the common association between homosexual eroticism and immaturity.

Isherwood not only emphasizes the value of keeping open the possibilities of queer desire but also the contingent importance of ecological preservation and a temporality that focuses on the present. Isherwood makes George's home and the beach on which he first meets Jim safe havens for queerness as well as conservation of the natural world. Reviewer Stanley Kauffman describes George as a man who "is no more an exile essentially than any man of sensibility faced with a world for which he is increasingly unequipped. […] There is no future for him, he knows, only a Now, and in that Now only a hunger for sex and company" (24). While Kauffman's assertion that George merely craves sex and company is suspect, he aptly indicates George's insistence on the Now. Although the narrative's timing is strictly linear, the sense of queer temporality established in the novel centers on the ever-ready deployment of the Now as opposed to the heteronormative fixation on the future. George's personal sense of time remains always in the present because his timing is how he sets himself apart from the heterosexuals and their destructiveness. Without the threat of consequences, a queer sense of time can remain open to all fluctuating possibilities. Jamie M. Carr identifies a queer temporality by arguing that Isherwood's earlier novels emphasize a "sense of time that is not linear […] nor 'progressive,' as a privileged temporal structure of history," a sense of time that seeks to shift the "paradigms of progress" (2).

Conversely, heterosexual couples' obsession with the future, centered primarily on reproduction and the motif of the nuclear family and the child, fits into a paradigm that is incessantly, mindlessly re-cycling itself in a loop of production-reproduction-consumption. Isherwood labels these heterosexuals "breeders" because of their unchecked and heedless reproduction. Like the heterosexual vermin in *Down There on a*

Visit, the breeders in *A Single Man* will eventually cycle out themselves and the rest of the world through their careless procreation, their unbridled and destructive use of natural resources, and their dependence on endless consumption of goods and technology which is directly connected to environmental destruction. The novel is shaded with a fatalism that stems from a distrust of the breeders as well as George's recognition of the increasing victimization of the natural world brought on by humans' destructive hubris. This makes any all natural spaces or attempts at queerness necessarily transitory and always at the behest of George's fixation upon death.

It is essential to remember that at the novel's core is George, a man grieving the loss of his partner. Because of his grief, George's main motivation in the novel revolves around not just remembering Jim by keeping him present but also in raging against the forces that brought about Jim's death.[3] For example, George claims to feel a "kind of patriotism for the freeways," despite his hatred for automobiles, because his participation in the act of driving to work and the forward motion signified by the freeway means he can "claim to be a functioning member of society. He can still *get by*" (33). Jim is always present, everywhere George moves, but particularly in their own home, where George imagines Jim visiting him like "an observer from another country who is permitted to peep in for a moment from the vast outdoors of his freedom and see, at a distance, through glass this figure who sits solitary at the small table in the narrow room, eating his poached eggs humbly and dully, a prisoner for life" (15). The weight of George's sadness is evident in both of these passages. I include these descriptions as a

[3] In the 2009 film adaptation of the novel, Tom Ford gives George's character an added, if somewhat stereotypical, dimension: he contemplates suicide, toying with a gun, all day. While this detail does some work to illustrate the extreme stress and grief from which George suffers, it merely adds back in the classic avenue of escape and damnation presented to homosexual characters in previous novels.

way of illustrating the privileging of George's personal relationship over every other narrative in the novel because despite his ecological visions, George is no environmentalist. Rather, he blames breeders, specifically Doris, whom I discuss later in this chapter, for Jim's death. All other motivations spin off from the primacy of the Jim's (non)presence in the novel. Although he comprehends the destruction that breeding and consumerism inflicts upon the natural world, George himself does privilege the natural world as a space or force that has value on its own. Rather, he subordinates it to human definition, desire and appropriation, seeking out spaces that will serve his queerness and his need to keep Jim present foremost and not vice versa. The relationship involves an interplay between privileging both queer and ecological narratives, but queerness—George's homosexuality chiefly—takes precedence over all else.[4]

Much of the previous criticism on *A Single Man* focuses on the frank and positive depiction of George's sexuality, as well as the revision to stereotypes of homosexuals prevalent in the 1960s, and what Joseph Bristow calls "the mutable—even chimerical—form of [George's] identities" (148).[5] David Garnes argues Isherwood makes George's

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[4] But the scene also takes on more complexity when the gay community, or lack thereof, in the novel is considered. When the book begins, Jim is already dead, and George experiences increasing isolation. In a 1973 interview, Isherwood, explaining the choice of not "juggling a domestic homosexual relations on top of all the other factors in the book" by making Jim dead from the beginning of the novel, describes George's lack of "philosophical support" once his partner is dead: "The more intense the happiness, the more poignancy one feels in the fact that it can only be for a certain while, that things change, and that one is separated from people by death and circumstances" (Kaplan 122, 123). His only friend is Charlotte, an English exile like himself but decidedly heterosexual. Gregory Woods, who aptly mentions George's hatred of his suburban neighbors and their children as well as "his misogyny in silent rants against heterosexual breeding habits," reduces George's "jaundiced anti-heterosexualism" to a one-dimensional problem—the lack of a gay community in the novel (345). I think the lack of a gay community in *A Single Man* is not so much as problem that the author should have solved but rather a symptom of George's condition. That gives his vision greater weight. So, even if George does not get an external, gay community of his own, Isherwood endows him an ability to queer whatever he wants.

[5] S. Nagarajan argues for Isherwood's use of Vedanta's lack of the separate single man because he sees "several Georges all functioning at the same time" (68). Nagarajan classifies the multiple Georges as either public or private, while the "criticism of the American society implied in the novel is that it produces these purely 'public' characters and their converses without giving any opportunity to its members to realize the truth of 'pure' consciousness" (68). George's "pure consciousness," I would argue, is most strongly felt in

sexuality unremarkable and that "George is meant to be seen as a kind of Everyman, a character whose closely observed life reflects the human condition" (198). Similarly, David Garrett Izzo emphasizes George as "an Everyman who just happens to be gay and that his bereavement is no less painful for him that it would be for anyone else" (235). David Bergman sees Isherwood as revising "the received notions of gay people, and *A Single Man* stands in marked contrast to the two reigning images of the homosexual in the sixties: the denizen of the demimonde and the beautiful ephebe" (206). Reed Woodhouse argues that George is a "warrior—a 'single' one and unlikely to win" and locates George's "heroism" in "his willingness to fight back against time, his body, the sentimental hypocrisies of his society, the cult of sexual normality, the multiple untamed selves that cohabit his psyche" (156).[6] And while Mario Faraone gets closer to my own queer ecological interpretation with his assertion that George is "a perfect symbol of the sterility and spiritual desert in which he lives," Faraone ultimately eschews George's *desire* for erotic exchange in favor of "the impossibility of true connection" (255). While these critics' arguments are plausible, they do not take into account what I see as Isherwood's obvious embrace of environmental language. By focusing exclusively on George's queerness, they are limiting their interpretations to the sexual proclivities of the human world while ignoring the other-than-human world. In fact, Isherwood's candid treatment of George as a middle-aged, gay man is mutually dependent upon George's

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the times when he embraces the present and rejects futurity.

[6] And as Peter Parker states, "Isherwood felt no one could be more single, more isolated, than a homosexual man whose partner had died, because society did not acknowledge the partnership, and so did not recognize this particular bereavement. He had also taken a single man, just one individual, to illustrate a whole culture and way of life, and he had done this by taking a single day in this man's life, which begins with an assertion of individuality" (623). The novel is in many ways an imagining of how a middle-aged homosexual man would cope with the loss of his partner. Some, including Isherwood himself, have suggested that the novel arose from a turbulent period in the partnership between Isherwood and Don Bachardy, thirty years his junior.

observations of an encroaching, destructive, heterosexual world, which is determined to accumulate possessions, reproduce like an epidemic, and diminish the natural world and queerness.

The beach in *A Single Man*, the public, outdoor space that serves as a central queer site for George, is, in Gordon Brent Ingram's words, an important space for "learning social skills, for exchange of information, for peer support, and for identity formation" (104). The beach is where George first meets Jim, touching off a long-term, (mostly) devoted relationship between them. But it is not a space reserved exclusively for gay men. The beach is a natural, queer site because it remains, until the end of World War II and the consequent Baby Boom, untouched by encroaching suburbia and its destructive residents and their attachment to heteronormativity. "In the beach-months of 1946," the "magic squalor of those hot nights, when the whole shore was alive with tongues of flame, the watchfires of a vast naked barbarian tribe" allows "coupling without shame in the sand" for *all* participants (*Single Man* 148). Completely unrestricted, the beach permits a full range of unabashed erotic contact and play. This "bohemian utopia" supports free and open sex as well as a pagan embrace of nature.

Significantly, this is the same place George takes Kenny, a student whom George attempts to seduce. With Kenny, George is able to temporarily reclaim the beach as a site of spontaneous queer seduction, play, and touch. After a trip to the Starboard Side, George's favorite bar, the two descend to the beach and shed their clothes. As the couple drunkenly runs toward the water, "their bodies rub against each other, briefly but roughly. […] Their relationship, whatever it now is, is no longer symbolic" (161). Their play is sanctioned and encouraged by the natural world. As they descend into the water, naked

and eager, it appears the "waves and the night and the noise exist only *for their play*" (163, my emphasis). Kenny is an elegant "water-creature," like Venus emerging from the ocean foam, while George sputters and chokes, receiving "the stunning baptism of the surf […] becoming always cleaner, freer, less" (162-3).[7] The water washes George of the labels he fears, includes him in a queer community of his own invention, making him, as well as Kenny, a more natural creature immersed in the ocean and in queerness. Their mutual ejaculatory release is also undeniable here: they play with themselves and are made wet together.

The beach scene's positioning in the novel makes it the climax (pun intended) and the closest George gets to having a sexual encounter within the novel, and it is all of George's making. That Kenny is seemingly heterosexual and only interested in using George's home for trysts with his girlfriend is beside the point. He is certainly queered in the novel, open to George's invitation. The erotic encounter forces George to question, "[W]hat is this life of ours supposed to be *for*? Are we to spend it identifying each other with catalogues, like tourists in an art gallery? Or are we to try to exchange some signal, however garbled, before it's too late?" (174). What's important here is George's insistence on *exchange*, some kind of bodily, physical communication that would eliminate harmful social identifiers, confirm his existence and iterate his sexuality, generate some human-to-human connection, and formulate a relationship with the natural world. After George's questions comes his repudiation of the "miserable fools and

[7] Of the images of baptism, James Berg suggests that they "are not merely a reaching back to prewar texts (the scene is reminiscent of the 'sacred lake' in *A Room with a View*) but also owe a debt to Isherwood's study of Vedanta and Hindu texts as well as his involvement with Southern California beach culture. The images of borders and refugees may relate to Europe and Mortmere, but they owe at least as much to California and Mexico (as we can see from *Down There on a Visit*) and from being an outsider (gay, in this instance) in a world organized against him" ("American Isherwood" 17).

prudes and cowards" who do not realize "what the bed *means*—that's what experience *is*!" (174-5). In fact, according to George, the tragic condition of the modern world is the emphasis on "flirtation instead of fucking" (176). Although George fails to bed Kenny, their flirtation enables a spontaneous, playful and ever-changing dialogue between them. "[B]ut not a Platonic dialogue," Isherwood cautions, "not a debate on some dreary set theme. You can talk about anything and change the subject as often as you like. In fact, what really matters is not what you talk about, but the being together in this particular relationship" (154). It is a dialogue that does not look forward or back; rather, their conversation remains in the present.

And while the implementation of the memory of things past might seem antithetical to the Now-ness of queer temporality, the way Isherwood intersperses memories of Jim into the main action of novel (itself written in present tense) is telling. Isherwood uses the fragments of George's memory to make his home space another natural, queer site in the novel. Memories of his domestic life with Jim come in pieces but make up a dialogue with the past that reinforces the domestication and isolation of their queerness. "As good as being on our own island," George observes when he first sees the house (20). Indeed, everything about the home suggests a kind of environmental economy absent in the homes of their breeding neighbors: the garage, overgrown with ivy, is home to Jim's menagerie of animals rather than an automobile, indicating the couple's emphasis on conservation of nature rather than acquiring technological items; the house is "a tightly planned little house," suggesting not only resistance to expansion of *any* kind but also the promise and recovering of physical play and contact—"constantly jogging, jostling, bumping against each other's bodies by mistake or on

purpose, sensually, aggressively, awkwardly, impatiently, in rage or in love" (12); it is an older, lived-in home, not like the brand new structures built by his neighbors; and it is, for all purposes, George's refuge, isolated and distant, where his memories of Jim and his queerness are preserved. Ecologically speaking, George's home space is abounding with an ethic of conservation.

When Jim declares, "Oh, well, I expect [the house will] last our time," he embraces the home's separateness and decrepit state (it is only accessible by an old, rickety bridge) as well as the "our time" which he assigns only to himself and George. Later, George claims the home's isolation for the sanctioning of his queerness. Imagining himself as a monster in a fairy tale in his isolated lair, George vocalizes his resistance to his breeding neighbors: "The fiend that won't fit into their statistics, the Gorgon that refuses their plastic surgery, the vampire drinking blood with tactless uncultured slurps, the bad-smelling beast that doesn't use their deodorants, the unspeakable that insists, despite all their shushing, on speaking its name" (27). By opposing the status quo and refusing consumerism, George iterates his queerness and ecological awareness as well as his ability to disrupt normative modes of time by remaining in the "our time" and the bohemianism that Jim embraces. By imagining himself as the monster isolated from his breeding neighbors, he is separating himself from their brand of temporality as a way of reclaiming his lost love.

Since "breeding and bohemianism do not mix," Isherwood is able to enact a complete ideological and temporal separation between the bohemian George and the breeders who are his neighbors. Isherwood's biographer, Peter Parker, points out that, in Isherwood's notes to the earlier version of *A Single Man*, which had been tentatively

titled *The Englishwoman* and centered on the character of Charlotte rather than George, an interesting pattern emerges: "When she first comes to America after the War she feels a great romance in this attitude of his. […] But then they have a child and everything changes. The Husband is scared. Suddenly he believes in Security. He has to Get a Job and Support His Loved Ones. He is a bit like a zombie. He moves away from her" (qtd. in Parker 615). The Husband is literally the living dead, stripped of autonomy and living only for the upkeep of His Loved Ones. The introduction of the child is the end of the romantic, bohemian relationship between the husband and wife. Isherwood's deliberate capitalization of such terms as "Get a Job" highlights them as Platonic ideals. As a result, to be a breeder "you need a steady job, you need a mortgage, you need credit, you need insurance. And don't you dare die, either, until the family's future is provided for" (*A Single Man* 19).

The way that George's queer time becomes manifest is through his claim on the present, as I briefly mentioned above. This fixation on the Now is born in part from the anger and pain he feels at having lost his partner and in another part from a fear of the future instigated by his distrust of his destructive, breeding neighbors. Remaining in the present is George's weapon against the breeder mentality and his means of reclaiming Jim from the past. The following declaration is prefaced by George's oscillating consciousness, which highlights the fragility of George's vision. In this moment of self-questioning and -answering, George in turn convinces himself: "Jim is in the past, now"; "But George remembers him so faithfully"; "Jim is my life"; "Jim is death"; "But George is getting old. Won't it very soon be too late?" (182). The tension between the present and past is more a symptom of George's confused grief than it is his irresoluteness. Jim,

though spoken of in the past tense throughout the novel, is fully present to George, a force or energy with which George is constantly engaging. The culmination of George's past-present debate is the following proclamation: "Damn the future. Let Kenny and the kids have it. […] George only clings to Now. It is Now that he must find another Jim. Now that he must love. Now that he must live" (182). As I stated before, George's main motivation is reclaiming Jim to the present moment. By condemning the future and giving it over to "the kids," George firmly places himself and his need to find "another Jim"—whatever form he might take—in the present moment.

George's declaration is an empowering one, and Isherwood's speculation on his death only a few pages later is interesting in light of queer time's relationship to longevity. The temporality and now-ness in this scene is reminiscent of the opening of the novel in which George awakes from a night's sleep:

> Waking up begins with saying *am* and *now*. That which has awoken then lies for a while staring up at the ceiling and down into itself until it has recognized *I*, and therefrom deduced *I am*, *I am now*. *Here* comes next, and is at least negatively reassuring; because *here*, this morning, is where it has expected to find itself: what's called *at home*. But *now* isn't simply now. *Now* is also a cold reminder: one whole day later than yesterday, one year later than last year. Every *now* is labeled with its date, rendering all past *nows* obsolete, until—later or sooner—perhaps—no, not perhaps—quite certainly: it will come. (9)[8]

[8] The opening of Isherwood's novel is strangely reminiscent of one of Darl's monologues in William Faulkner's 1930 novel *As I Lay Dying*, a novel itself steeped in issues surrounding ecology and sexuality. I do not think it is much of a stretch to compare the two—Darl, like George, is considered queer and is an outsider in his world. Darl is also endowed with some kind of special vision that allows him to see things that others cannot apparently see. The passage in *As I Lay Dying* to which I am referring is the one in which Darl provides what is essentially a set of instructions for how one should prepare oneself for sleep:

> In a strange room you must empty yourself for sleep. And before you are emptied for sleep, what

Appearing at the very beginning of the novel, this passage introduces the importance of the present deployment of time and George's concern with staying in the moment as well as the inevitability of death. The intermingling of the *I-am-here-now* and George's insistence on being *at home*, rather than establishing a sense of progression that parallels repro-time, actually highlight the acknowledgement of temporality that is not concerned with inheritance. "*I'm afraid of being rushed*," George declares to his reflection in the mirror, despite the fact that "The creature we are watching will struggle on and on until it drops. Not because it is heroic. It can imagine no alternative" (11, 10). George is not delusional or romantic about the future; it is merely an unpleasant inevitability that cannot be supplanted by inheritance or procreation.

One of the ways Isherwood critiques notions of Cold War containment and homophobia is by grafting onto George the persona of the militant and angry "Uncle George." Imagining the newspaper editors and reporters as "vermin," Uncle George accuses each of being responsible for Jim's death: "their words, their thoughts, their whole way of life willed it, even though they never knew he existed" (40). "Their" words, thoughts, and lifestyles are the summation of that which Uncle George is in opposition. The newspaper people, like the vermin breeders, are anti-queer and not environmentally attuned, since they not only seek to prohibit "sex deviates" but also promote "rocket war" and total ecological destruction. Uncle George imagines the

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> are you. And when you are emptied for sleep, you are not. And when you are filled with sleep, you never were. I don't know what I am. I don't know if I am or not. […] And then I must be, or I could not empty myself for sleep in a strange room. And so if I am not emptied yet, I am *is*. How often have I lain beneath rain on a strange roof, thinking of home. (81)

Darl is a shape shifter, like George, going existent to non-existent. He goes from empty to *is* in a matter of moments, questioning whether he is or ever has been. It has also been argued that the emptying Darl does in this scene is a masturbatory act, linking it again to the ending of *A Single Man* in which George masturbates and then falls asleep. The association between sleeping, existence and home is also an important one since it is one's home space, particularly in the case of George, in which one is at one's most existent.

ultimate punishment for them: forcing them to perform various and sundry sex acts upon each other in a display of open eroticism. Indeed, the "uncle" part of his moniker is also important to the formulation of the queer ecological persona, and it calls to mind Sedgwick's characterization of avuncular relationships and their association with queer temporality. Avuncular relationships can be imagined "not, that is, as alternately abject and omnipotent, links in a chain of compulsion and replication that leads inevitably to *you*; but rather as elements in a varied, contingent, recalcitrant but re-forming seriality, as people who demonstrably could have turned out very differently—indeed as people who, in the differing, refractive relations among their own generation, can be seen already to have done so" (*Tendencies* 63). By charting this description, Sedgwick intends for the avuncular relationship to be "messy," as they are not parents themselves but representatives of a "varied, contingent, recalcitrant" series. That is, uncles are necessarily queer, already marginalized because of their resistance to being "links in a chain." George's creation of Uncle George engages in an outrage associated with social inequality. But Uncle George and his "varied, contingent, recalcitrant" nature also represent the paradigmatic fear of deviant sexual behavior in postwar America.

Significantly, in this novel written at the height of the Cold War, Isherwood associates apocalypse with unchecked reproduction, misuse of the land, and overextension of resources, particularly water, rather than with nuclear warfare. The hills outside Los Angeles, once so wild and largely uninhabited, except for the wildlife—coyotes, rattlesnakes, and deer—have seen the encroachment of human populations. I include this lengthy quote because it is to me the key behind the specific apocalypse in *A Single Man*:

> True, there are still a few uninhabited canyons, but George can't rejoice in them; he is oppressed by awareness of the city below. On both sides of the hills, to the north and to the south, it has spawned and spread itself over the entire plain. It has eaten up the wide pastures and ranchlands and the last stretches of orange grove; it has sucked out the surrounding lakes and sapped the forests of the high mountains. Soon it will be drinking converted sea water. And yet it will die. No need for rockets to wreck it, or another ice age to freeze it, or a huge earthquake to crack it off and dump it in the Pacific. It will die of overextension. It will die because its taproots have dried up—the brashness and greed which have been its only strength. And the desert, which is the natural condition of this country, will return. (111)

The city is described as a living organism, but it is a parasitic, unsustainable one. This is an apocalypse, an end of times, *not* brought about by nuclear warfare or even an uncontrollable natural disaster.[9] Rather, it is apocalypse that comes at the hands of

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[9] Excerpts from Isherwood's diaries reveal a similar concern with the waste and sprawl of California in his personal life. A February 6, 1961 entry reads:

> One thing I won't forget—driving up to the top of the hills with Monroe and Bill Enge and John Connolly yesterday, after Marguerite's party, and looking down over the city. All the platforms cut out of the hillsides, ready for pretentious French chateau-style houses "worth" eighty thousand maybe, but no more than slum dwellings because so crowded and viewless and altogether wretched. And I had the sense of something spawning itself to destruction, spreading and spreading out until its strength is exhausted and then shriveling up and dying, and then the rockets, or the new ice age, or the whole slab of coast cracking off along the earthquake fault and sliding into the sea; lost in any case. And the quickie promoters and real estate agents hustling to make their dollars before it happens. Such a sick sad knowledge that this is "Babylon the great city" and it can't end well—and was never and could never be great, anyway. (*The Sixties* 46-47)

Over a year later, on April 5, 1962, Isherwood writes:

> Yesterday, Michael Barrie drove Gerald, Joe Ackerley, Don and me to Laguna Beach and San Juan Capistrano. We were supposed to look at the flowers. Certainly, the hills around Laguna Canyon were a beautiful bluish green, with thick patches of lupines, and mustard, and white flower-clumps, like streaks of late snow, which Gerald and Michael call elyssium—I can't find that name in the dictionary, however; only alyssum. But the rest of the drive, down through Long Beach, was a wretched cavalcade of billboards, telegraph wires and poles, fluttering pennants on used car lots, gas stations, hot-dog stands, etc. etc., and I could feel Joe thinking, "This is their America, is it—well they can keep it." (174)

people—too many people whose "brashness and greed" is manifested by is misuse of the Earth. Desert, signifier of barrenness and loneliness, is, in fact, "the natural condition" for that part of the country. Anyone who does not conform to what Isherwood identifies as the breeders' falsified image of an "American utopia," for which they are "ready to purge and starve themselves for generations, in the hopeless hope of inheriting it," is subject to Nadel's concept of the nuclear gaze and its distrust of ambiguous motives (26).

George also fears surviving into a "Rubble Age." When the subject of fallout shelters comes up in conversation with a colleague, Grant, who despite all his liberal attitudes, George condemns him as having "three imprudently begotten children" (86). The Rubble Age will come, George imagines, because of the Grants of the world, and it will "be quite natural for Mr. Strunk to gun down Grant and his wife and three children, because Grant has neglected to lay sufficient stores of food and they are starving and may therefore possibly become dangerous and this is no time for sentiment" (88). The threat of apocalypse by starvation is manifest again in this passage.

The apocalypse appears to be localized, unique to the state of California, where Isherwood sees the unchecked spread of people and their materialism which will literally dry up the land. In his short essay entitled "Los Angeles," written about 15 years before *A Single Man*, Isherwood expresses similar sentiments. He sees "the monster market-garden,"[10] the sea of advertisements that greets people coming into the city as vapid yet seductive, making "this rude abundance […] nearly as depressing as the desolation of the wilderness. The imagination turns sulky" (157). The way to fight the influence of consumerism and "to live sanely," says Isherwood, is to "cultivate the art of staying

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Both of these excerpts reveal Isherwood's very real preoccupation with the state of California's ecology. Note also how both entries involve driving—another annoyance of the environmentally aware Isherwood.

[10] This is a term that resurfaces in Atwood's *The Edible Woman* to describe the supermarket.

awake." Again, I quote this passage at length because it contains some of Isherwood's most powerful commandments on surviving the city and its corresponding usurpation, by way of consumerism, of free will:

> You must learn to resist (firmly but not tensely) the unceasing hypnotic suggestions of the radio, the billboards, the movies and the newspapers; those demon voices which are forever whispering in your ear what you should desire, what you should fear, what you should wear and eat and drink and enjoy and what you should think and do and be. *They have planned a life for you—from the cradle to the grave and beyond—which it would be easy, fatally easy, to accept.* The least wandering of the attention, the least relaxation of your awareness, and already your eyelids begin to droop, the eyes grow vacant, the body starts to move in obedience to the hypnotist's command. Wake up, wake up—before you sign that seven-year contract, buy that house you don't really want, marry that girl you secretly despise. (161, my emphasis)

To give into consumption, to buy the house and marry the girl, is to give up on one's free will. The alternative to resistance is compliance, which is in turn confinement and death-in-life.[11] He illustrates this lifestyle, the one I have identified with "repro-time" and the environmentally destructive tendencies of the breeders, which Isherwood and George

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[11] "Los Angeles" takes a purely ecocritical turn in its conclusion. Another way to resist, or at least to remind oneself of the "natural condition" of California, is to visit the still wild outposts of the state. The is where the "real nature" of California lies, but Isherwood cautions adventurers because the landscape will remind human visitors of their impermanence in relation to an anthropomorphized Earth here. The land tells the visitor that he is welcome

> during your short visit. Everything is at your disposal. Only, I must warn you, if things go wrong, don't blame me. I accept no responsibility. I am not part of your neurosis. Don't cry to me for safety. There is no home here. There is no security in your mansions and your fortresses, your family vaults or your bank or your double beds. Understand this fact, and you will be free. Accept it and you will be happy. (162)

The Earth is a force that remains aloof to humans' need to dominate and package it. It acknowledges humans' transience and discounts human systems and structures as empty means of security and permanence. The things we build and covet are no guarantee against eventual ecological collapse.

scorn. Isherwood's command here to stay awake reads a lot like the opening to *A Single Man* in which George wakes himself from sleep and becomes fully conscious of the destruction and entrapment around him.

Perhaps part of Isherwood's command to resist comes in part from his own status as a minority, the unacknowledged and unspeakable in the midst of the heterosexual, reproductive and consuming units of people. As William Alexander McClung acknowledges, the cycle that George is imagining is inevitable and a combination of the "earth's resuming its rhythms after human beings' interruptions, [and] a vengeful response to, as he puts it, greed" (50). But George sees himself as somehow separate from the city's destructive means and ends, as he "demonizes the city as a mindless, insatiable, primitive life-form, while implying that the prior uses off the land (pasture, ranches, orchards, were immemorial and legitimate, unlike, apparently, housing" (49). These people tend, like George's students with their "infuriating sheep-obstinacy," to crowd together (55). Their buildings are clustered, ugly, variously designed and encroaching on the pristine wilderness George imagines existed at one point. In fact, George, during on of his Uncle George fantasies, imagines destroying a "huge, insolent high-rise building which will contain one hundred apartments" and "will block the view along the coast from the park on the cliffs above" (36). The means? Either spraying the building's girders with something that will cause the gradual smell of rotting corpses or "a kind of virus" that will eat into metal causing "the whole thing [to] sag and subside into a limp, tangled heap, like spaghetti" (37, 38).[12] The building's offense is not merely

[12] Interestingly, both methods—the smell of rotting corpses and a material-eating virus—mimic the wastage of the human body itself. Perhaps in a way, Isherwood is concluding that the destruction of building and property is necessarily, in the case of the breeders, simultaneous and consequential. That is to say, if one's building collapses, one might as well collapse too.

that it blocks the view of the landscape. It also houses the multitudes, packed into a tight space and living freely on what used to be undeveloped land. All around George is evidence that humans do not belong in this part of the world.

In fact, Raymond F. Dasmann's 1965 *The Destruction of California* is a useful frame through which to examine contemporary issues of land use in California. The book is an indictment of the population and building explosion in postwar California. His call for restraint in the proliferation of human beings, ecological destruction and suburban sprawl includes these questions about the alteration and devastation of California's geography: "Is it better now that the whole mass is blended together and covered with a pall of smoke? Was it really worth while corralling the Colorado and channeling the waters of northern California, to effect this change? Will the future development make it better or worse?" (4). Dasmann's subjects are the rapidity of population growth, the alteration of the landscape, and the evidence of the sheer amount of stuff—cars and houses, specifically—that begin to clutter the landscape after the Second World War.[13] The redirection of waterways particularly disturbs Dasmann. The damming of rivers will cause additional demand for water in places where is it not already accessible, causing "further growth of population and industry that will in turn create fresh demand for water, until every drop that can be captured anywhere will be used and reused. And then what happens? Are we planning for this day? Or do we expect some Armageddon to intervene before we must reach this final decision?" (20). While Dasmann's questions smack of the popular argument that there *are* plenty of resources

[13] Coming to a similar conclusion in his 1957 article "Urban Pressures on California Land," Howard Gregor explains that arable land in California was being reduced at alarming rates after WWII. The main culprit, according to Gregor, is the influx of people into California and their thirst for land on which to spread out, characterized by their tendency to "build out" (314). Additionally, the "population migrations to California have taken place in an age of automobiles," making population movement, rampant and destructive land use and economic development directly correlated (315).

available but they are only getting distributed to the wealthy, his questions are a response to what he sees as the rampant and unchecked proliferation of human beings and their contingent demands on the landscape.

Traces of the oncoming apocalypse show up at the end of World War II when the utopian, bohemian, queer spaces of George's past turn into spaces reserved for the sanctioning of the nuclear family and their impetus to consume in excess. The arrival of the breeders, characterized as a faceless, nameless mob that acquires endless objects, erases all traces of the natural landscape and the queerness that existed in George's bohemia. With the onslaught of the "domesticated servicemen," beach fires and pagan parties are prohibited on the once-queer, natural space of the beach, and "you must eat sitting up on benches at communal tables, and mustn't screw at all" (148). The Starboard Side, the bar George once frequented, installs a new television, that ever-ready symbol of technology and consumerism. George sees the television as responsible for the hypnosis and frigidity of the bar's patrons. They are absorbed in the television screen, disconnected from each other and firmly attached to this electrified object. Jean Baudrillard argues that people in a modern consumer society "are surrounded not so much by other human beings, as they were in all previous ages, but by objects" (25). These objects, he further explains, are "neither a flora or a fauna," apart from the "natural ecological laws," since "they are always arranged to mark out directive paths, to orientate the purchasing impulse towards networks of objects" in which the consumer becomes entrapped (25, 26, 27). Or, as George puts it, Americans are only living symbolically, they are adhering to a strict and confining "building code which demands certain measurements, certain utilities and the use of certain apt materials; no more and no less"

(91). "The Europeans hate us," George continues, getting on the stage like an actor in front of an audience, "because we've retired to live inside our advertisements, like hermits going into caves to contemplate. We sleep in symbolic bedrooms, eat symbolic meals, are symbolically entertained" (91).

Likewise, the domestication of the veterans and their growing families feeds a consumer need, not only entrapping them in the pointed network of the proliferation of objects but also contributing to what Baudrillard describes as "environmental nuisances," i.e. pollution (39). In fact, George is assaulted by the variety and sheer number of goods at the supermarket, where "[y]ou could spend hours of your life here, in a state of suspended insecurity, meditating on the multiplicity of things to eat": "Every article on the shelf cries out to you, Take me, take me" (*Single Man* 112). George is aware of the inability of these objects to fill the void and assuage his loneliness, because the items are empty of meaning and "what remains is only cardboard, cellophane and food" (113). Moreover, George associates the food with the many meals he has eaten with Jim, and he fears the "long landslide" of eating alone to drinking alone to "despair and sleeping pills and the inevitable final overdose" (113). Mingled with George's very real heartache over Jim is his understanding that these consumer goods, even the things on the supermarket shelf, are an empty substitute for what is real in the Baudrillardian sense.

What the breeders do not recognize is that they will inevitably destroy everything and everyone in the world because they reject environmental stewardship, and their notions of inheritance and futurity are utterly ridiculous. Isherwood describes the "The Change," the transition from the nature-friendly, erotically-charged queerness of George's world what happens:

> […] in the late forties, when the World War Two vets came swarming out of the East with their just-married wives, in search of *new and better breeding grounds* in the sunny Southland, which had been their last nostalgic glimpse of home before they shipped out to the Pacific. And what better breeding grounds than a hillside neighborhood like this one, only five minutes' walk from the beach and with no through traffic to decimate the *future tots*? So, one by one, the cottages which used to reek of bathtub gin and reverberate with the poetry of Hart Crane have fallen to the occupying army of *Coke-drinking television watchers*. (18, my emphases)

The description invokes Higbee's notion of the "residential nursery." The breeders' only motivation is acquiring household goods, building homes, and making babies. They come and destroy the beach. Their children must be protected at all costs from death by automobile (although it is gay Jim who is ironically killed in an automobile accident).[14] It is no mistake that these are "breeding grounds" for which they search. Like vermin who seek ideal territory for the purpose of their propagation, these people clear out land for their own purposes without a thought to environmental impact. "[L]itter after litter after litter" of "tots" appear in the neighborhood, forcing the expansion of schools and supermarkets. Isherwood's use of the word "litter" is concrete evidence of their sheer, overwhelming *number* as well as their relationship to debris and waste.

George, in his isolation, surrounded by the breeder-consumers and apparently the only one who can see the destruction that they fashion, begins to feel outnumbered.

[14] It is significant that Isherwood chooses the automobile as the "vehicle" of Jim's death. He is killed in an accident while engaging in a heterosexual affair, so the automobile is doubly damnable—as both the quintessential consumer item and environmental destroyer as well as the conveyance of his foray into heterosexuality. It seems that Isherwood makes the automobile a sort of death trap for Jim, punishing him for the engagement in a relationship with a women and his unseemly ride in the automobile.

Perhaps this is, in part, where much of his discussion about minorities originates. But since he is mostly closeted, George's minority status does not carry the weight he believes or hopes it does. Often his attention to other minorities is slightly misguided, much in the way that heterosexuals in this period remained misinformed about homosexuality. As I stated above, his alignment with ethnic and racial minorities signals George's desire to contain them. Since they are more visible as minorities than homosexuals, or at least the type of middle-aged, average and inconspicuous homosexual that George is, he harbors certain stereotypes with a protectionist attitude. His justification for romanticizing them ignores the fact that they are prolific breeders themselves. Rather, their poverty—their inability to build fancy homes, buy household goods, and consequently waste them—appeals to him.

George's fascination with ethnic minorities centers on those who live on the outskirts of town and whose homes he sees when he is driving down the freeway to the college campus. George imagines the charming and poignant stereotypes of the area's minorities: "Mexicans live here, so there are lots of flowers. Negroes live here, so it is cheerful" (41). But "these people are not The Enemy" like heterosexuals are the enemy, and if homosexuality were more visible or if it ever became acceptable "they might even be allies" (41-2). George fixates on and idealizes the Japanese- and Chinese-American students in his classroom, labeling their smiles "enigmatic," and imagining "their beauty is like the beauty of plants, seemingly untroubled by vanity, anxiety or effort" (61). Shooting a "deep shining look" at his only gay male student, George thinks, "I am with you, little minority-sister," but only manages to embarrass the student (70). Despite his good-natured desire to "teach him a lesson he'll never forget" and to "give him courage

to throw away his nail file and face the truth of his life," George confuses his entire class with a lecture they turn from "with a shrug and a grin, thinking the old peddler crazy" (70, 74). He seems to think that, as a homosexual and an English expatriate, he reserves the right to judge and evaluate the positioning of other minority groups. He thinks he shares something significant with all underrepresented groups, but as Isherwood makes quite clear, particularly in the space of the college campus, George is closeted. During his slightly nonsensical lecture about an Aldous Huxley novel, George introduces a larger discussion about the status of minorities and the threat they pose.[15] Of course, George is primarily referencing the danger posed by the "invisible" homosexual minority to which he belongs, speaking about himself specifically: "[A] minority is only thought of as a minority when it constitutes some kind of threat to the majority, real or imaginary. […]

[15] But Isherwood's choice of the Huxley novel is an interesting and telling one when analyzed in terms of futurity, of the Living minority and the Dead majority. *After Many a Summer* is about Jeremy Pordage, who comes to Southern California to archive the rare books in the collection of Jo Stoyte. This is a Southern California similar to Isherwood's with its predominant advertisements that scream out from the highway and the permeation of ethnic minorities. In his sixties, Stoyte's mantra has become, "God is love. There is no death." He is obsessed with his own mortality and has hired Dr. Obispo to run experiments in longevity on carp. The idea is to extend his own life and perhaps become immortal. Documents written by the Fifth Earl of Gonister about his own experiments in longevity reveal, "Parrots, Ravens, and Elephants are long-lived Creatures; from which we must conclude that the Brevity of human Life is due to other Causes than then manner which Men beget and Females reproduce their Kind" (269). Thus, longevity is detached from reproduction, and significantly, Stoyte is childless. Because of this, he is afraid and unwilling to join the Dead majority, both as a breeder (although he is a great consumer) and as a corpse. What Huxley shows us is the ridiculousness of the desire for longevity through untraditional means. Stoyte and Obispo discover the 201 year-old Earl of Gonister, whose own experiments in longevity have kept him alive but aged him and made him (d)evolve into an ape-like creature. The novel ends with Obispo's laughter, signaling Huxley's discomfort and ridicule for those who seek immortality. But it is not immortality that George seeks and that he is critiquing in his own lecture. Rather, he seems to be taking on Stoyte's refusal to join the majority to which he obviously belongs.
But it is in George's classroom lecture on Aldous Huxley's 1939 novel *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan* that the discussion of minorities is the most complex. The minority/majority split here is between the Living and the Dead. We have already seen Isherwood portray breeders as zombies, while George sees Americans who retreat inside their symbolic lives are the living dead as well (emphasis on the "dead"). In equating reproduction and consumption with death, even if it is a metaphorical or spiritual one, Isherwood again assigns the breeders to the majority. George ranks those who are queer, himself and those who have not given into "repro-time" and the consumption cycle, as part of "that marvelous minority, The Living" (103). Interestingly, that declaration is made after he visits Doris, the woman who attempted to ensnare Jim in a heterosexual relationship, in the hospital and directly after he witnesses a frenzied Christmas shopping rush outside a store, the consumers' "eyes reflecting, like polished buttons, the cynical sparkle of the Yuletide" (103). It is spoken as a rejection of not only the Dead and death but also the entire search for futurity through procreation and consumption—the futile attempt to stave off or erase one's mortality.

Sure, minorities are people—*people*, not angels. Sure, they're like us—but not *exactly* like us" (70-1).

Additionally, Isherwood indicts the university where George teaches literature classes for engaging in environmentally destructive behavior. This is despite George's opinion of his profession as university professor being somehow more eco-friendly than various other professions: "But isn't is a consolation to be with students who are still three-quarters alive? Isn't it some tiny satisfaction to be of *use*, instead of helping to turn out useless consumer goods?" (83). San Tomas State College is a site of "destruction-construction-destruction," where the hills have been flattened by bulldozers, the trees are not allow to grow before they are ripped out, and "the landscape is gashed with raw terraces" in order to build dormitories and accommodate a growing population (42). A "clean modern factory, brick and glass and big windows," the college churns out thousands of graduates each year, "the male and female raw material which is fed daily into this factory, along the conveyor belts of the freeways, to be processed, packaged and placed on the market" and is "cut off from the outside world by its own parking lots, which will then form an impenetrable forest of cars" (47, 43). Described accordingly, the university is uninterested in preserving natural spaces and has replaced forests of trees with forests of cars.[16] The university's primary goal is to produce students who are "preparing themselves for life which means a job and security in which to raise children to prepare themselves for life which means a job and security in which" (47). Isherwood ends the description abruptly because it is never-ending, self-perpetuating, and

[16] Cars, Isherwood tells us in "Los Angeles," are one of the primary problems in the area. Everyone either owns one or uses one and sees no problem traveling large distances to get from one place to another: "It is an essential, not a luxury, for the bus services are insufficient and there is no subway. I would scarcely know how to 'show' Los Angeles to a visitor. Perhaps the best plan would be to drive quite aimlessly, this way and that, following the wide streets of little stucco houses, gorgeous with flowering tree and bushes" (157).

representative of Halberstam's characterization of repro-time. Tellingly, this is the same cycle assigned to the "occupying army of Coke-drinking television watchers" in George's neighborhood.[17]

A good deal of Isherwood's distrust of reproduction and overconsumption lies within the characterization of women and children in the novel. Isherwood, in a telling and significant passage I will quote at length, characterizes Woman as Enemy for both very personal reasons and reasons relating to the queer ecological tone of the novel as a whole. According to S. Nagarajan, heterosexual relationships are impossible for George because "such a relationship exists only to provide an opportunity to Woman to exercise her biological rights over man and the man returns from the relationship with a feeling of disgust, self-anger, and a sense of having been exploited" (69). While I suggest that Nagarajan is misstating the "motivation" behind George's homosexuality and his pursuit of Kenny, I think he does arrive at a reasonable interpretation for George's encounter with Doris. While visiting Doris, the woman with whom Jim was having an affair and who was with Jim in the fatal automobile accident, in the hospital, George observes in horror:

What has it to do with that big arrogant animal of a girl? With that body which

[17] With the combination of Coke and television, this indictment is particularly damning. In his article about Coca-Cola's ad campaigns and role as symbol of American-ness and domesticity during World War II, Mark Weiner argues that Coca-Cola not only "embodies the egalitarian, self-directed spirit of consumer society in the United States" but also consistency and stasis of a mass-manufactured product (124). The Coca-Cola Company participated in the war effort by becoming not just a cultural symbol for GIs overseas but also a reality—the government implemented a program to bring Coke to the troops as a way of building morale. Coke is the symbol of American consumerism, embodied by its unvarying, fabricated, artificial sameness. As for television, I turn to Jerry Mander's classic denunciation of television and its control of the larger system of artificial environments, advertising and consumerism. He sarcastically characterizes the trickle down theory of economics as a "beautiful cycle of activity" (139). The cycle, "translated through the media and through our educational system into popular understanding," that involves "everyone helping everyone else, laboring together and management rowing the boat together, all serving the common good and growing endlessly" (139). Taken together, the fact that the breeders watch television *and* drink Coke implicates them in this artificial and ultimately destructive cycle that traps its adherents.

> sprawled stark naked, gaping wide in shameless demand, underneath Jim's naked body? Gross insucking vulva, sly ruthless greedy flesh, in all the bloom and gloss and arrogant resilience of youth, demanding that George shall step aside, bow down and yield to the female prerogative, hide his unnatural head in shame. I am Doris. I am Woman. I am Bitch Mother Nature. The Church and the Law exist to support me. I claim my biological rights. I demand Jim. […] because Doris was infinitely more than Doris, was Woman the Enemy, claiming Jim for herself. No use destroying Doris, or ten thousand Dorises, as long as Woman triumphs. (95-6)

Although Doris is not technically a breeder, the specter of her reproductive possibility, which is represented by her anatomy, is particularly disturbing to George. The misogynistic undertones in George's tirade illustrate his underlying discomfort with all things female, including Doris and representations of Mother Nature. The discomfort stems not only from the unchecked and wild breeding potential that George believes lies in women but also George's own enraged narrow-mindedness. This is as close as Isherwood gets to imposing a more acceptable paradigm than heterosexuality. Although I would argue that George has every right to be upset about his partner's death, I will also point out that George's suspicion of all things heterosexual is deeply linked with his sense of queerness and environmental destruction.

Highlighting the futility of killing "ten thousand Dorises," George articulates the insurmountable biological imperative of heterosexuality. Killing her will not erase all the other breeders. George's revulsion for the vagina reflects his horror and culminating disdain for the breeding, consumptive lifestyle, as well as his own personal contempt for

Doris's attempt to "convert" Jim to heterosexuality. She is shameless, open and spread wide, a vacuum-like vulva unnaturally consuming the entire world. Besides this, she is the ultimate consumer personified. He plays up the irony of associating the natural with a procreative mother image because he does not see a natural association between the two. There is deviation from his own appreciation of the natural world—namely, the beach, the unpopulated landscape, and any other space that supports his queerness—and the destructively procreative and entirely constructed image of Mother Nature. In the horror of this vision, the "Bitch Mother Nature" is a deviation from the benevolent and loving Mother of lore. Rather than produce natural resources for the good of her "children," Bitch Mother Nature reverses the process by eating them alive. Her demand to "claim" Jim stems from the biological imperative of Woman's (with a capital "W") reproductive capabilities, the so-called "female prerogative." George is not far off the mark, though, by thinking that Doris's sexuality is state sanctioned. The Cold War-era politics of reproduction supported the notion of a Baby Boom and the building of an insular home space filled to the ceiling with consumer goods.

Incidentally, Isherwood's depictions of other heterosexual couples, and by extension their children, are uniformly negative. Their anxiety regarding George's homosexuality is centered on imagining him as a monster in their midst and by keeping him isolated. In keeping with queer ecological principles, Isherwood suggests that Mr. and Mrs. Strunk lead consumer-driven, thwarted and narrow lives, and their son, Benny, is a destructive renegade. Mrs. Strunk, "grown wearily gentle from toiling around the house at her chores, gently melancholy from regretting her singing days on the radio; all given up in order to bear Mr. Strunk five boys and two girls," embodies a potentially

bohemian life cut off by the postwar domestic imperative (21). A June 1958 entry from Isherwood's diaries shows him behaving in much the same manner as George. Referencing the noise caused by the children next door, Isherwood complains:

> The day began badly because I flew out and shouted at the kids, who were spraying water from the Hines' house over the Simca. Not much water—that didn't matter—but the noise! It not only disturbs me when I'm working, it threatens me with not being able to work if I want to. I heard Mrs. Hines reproving the kids later. Of course she thinks I'm an old prissy ill-natured queen, and let her, with all my heart, if it makes her keep her children away! (760)

His repulsion and frustration with the Hines children is offset by his own assumption that Mrs. Hines is marking him with an epithet. The result is an interesting blend of liberation and containment—free of children and their noise, Isherwood can work at any time and pace he wishes, but at the same time, the "old prissy ill-natured queen" exists in isolation and as a matter of prejudice. Like Isherwood, George imagines a homophobic Mr. Strunk attempting "to nail him down with a word. *Queer*, he doubtless growls" (*A Single Man* 27). Interestingly, George thinks Mr. Strunk's "natural" tendencies as homosocial if not fully homosexual. Mr. Strunk, who "used to be what many would call a living doll," is more interested in male company that that of his wife. He seems fully satisfied with his heterosexual, breeding "kingdom," but he still retains an anxiety surrounding his own homosocial tendencies as well as George's presence in the neighborhood (27, 26).

As for Mrs. Strunk, "trained in the new tolerance, the technique of annihilation by blandness," she is almost purely consumer and only interested in eschewing difference rather than embracing it. Her attempts at tolerance are misguided because, as Isherwood

reveals, she cannot hope to ever understand the complexities and realities of a same-sex partnership such as George and Jim's. She reads all the latest books and psychology and spews information ad hoc. Although she appears to tolerate George despite his queerness, she has a skewed, clinical view of the homosexual, entirely informed by contemporary psychology:

> Reading from it in sweet singsong she proceeds to exorcise the unspeakable out of George. No reason for disgust, she intones, no cause for condemnation. Nothing here that is willfully vicious. All is due to heredity, early environment (Shame on those possessive mothers, those sex-segregated British schools!), arrested development at puberty, and-or glands. Here we have a misfit, debarred forever from the best things of life, to be pitied, not blamed. […] Let us even go so far as to say that this kind of relationship can sometimes be almost beautiful—particularly if one of the parties is already dead, or, better yet, both. (27-8)[18]

The "best things in life," as Mrs. Strunk figures it, are children, homes, and purchasing power. Also, the implication that queers are better off dead is significant on several levels: first, by iterating the fear of homosexuality in terms of who "deserves" to live,

[18] Mrs. Strunk's clinical definition is evidence of the prevalence of contemporary psychological explanations for homosexuality. Frank Caprio's 1958 study on *The Sexually Adequate Male* attempts to account for homosexuality by assigning Freudian meanings to "perversity" and some men's inability to perform with women: "Boys rebel against their mothers who try to make husband-substitutes out of them. They refuse to be looked on as 'sissies' by other boys. It is this basic feeling of inferiority in the male child which is very often fostered by a mother who means well but nevertheless does harm, which accounts for the development of a homosexual pattern, in adolescence and adult life" (175-6). By boiling homosexuality down to the effects of the smothering, coddling mother who was this generation's monster, Caprio eschews any agency on the male child's part. Caprio accounts for both homosexual men's refusal to service a woman and his desire to engage sexually with men as "of course a defense mechanism for not being able to accept a woman as a sexual being—an unconscious wish to idealize womanhood. […] It explains why many homosexuals enjoy a sexless companionship with elderly women (mother-surrogates)" (177). Caprio sees physical manifestation of homosexuals' collective misunderstanding of the unconsciousness; "Hence they find it difficult to discipline themselves successfully" (178). Amongst the ailments connected to denying their unconscious (but somehow connected to their feelings of guilt and anxiety) are depression, fatigue, and fainting.

Mrs. Strunk articulates the common trope of the biological and social "unnaturalness" of queerness; second, Mrs. Strunk *believes* in popular notions that homosexuality is merely a neurosis that can be cured with prompt therapy, which emphasizes the accepted notion that heterosexuality is healthy and queerness is unhealthy; and last, Mrs. Strunk endorses the symbolic relationship between George and the now-dead Jim, engaging in erotophobia, rather than the tactile, grounded relationship of their lived reality. Indeed, George counters contemporary psychology by stating, "Jim wasn't a substitute for anything" (29). But despite Mrs. Strunk's best efforts to "accept" George's queerness, it is evident that her view of healthy and productive relationships falls into a very narrow category: acquiring goods and bearing children are the only manifestations of naturalness and normativity for her.

The future, to people like Mr. and Mrs. Strunk, lies in their son Benny, who is the representative Child in the novel. Benny is this symbolic Child, confirming the heteronormative belief that the "Child remains the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the fantasmic beneficiary of every political intervention" (Edelman 3). But he is a perversion, and Isherwood uses the boy to illustrate the illegitimacy of the reproduction-consumption pattern. Portrayed as a "junior consumer,"[19] Benny is destructive and violent toward natural entities and on a direct course to perpetuating his parents' lifestyle. An ominous "CHILDREN AT PLAY" sign appears in George's neighborhood, and it is a threat rather than a mere observation. The child's "play" is not the kind of play depicted by Mortimer-Sandilands as being essential

[19] This term comes from Cynthia, another one of George's colleagues. She laments at how "hideously" children are dressed in America and how they are "being cheated out of their childhood" (89). The reason? "They're being turned into *junior consumers*!" she exclaims, seeing "those dreadful dainty little creatures wearing lipstick" as the primary downfall of morality. Similar to George's ethnic idealization and stereotyping, Cynthia interestingly notes that Mexican children "are so real. No anxiety. No other-direction. They just bloom" (89).

to queer ecology—his play involves no spontaneous touch and redeploys heteronormative consumerism. Benny, "hammer in hand" begins smashing a broken bathroom scale he retrieves from the trashcan as George watches from inside his home. "[M]aking believe the machine is screaming with pain," Benny appears violently disturbed to George (Isherwood 23). Mrs. Strunk, however, believes "Benny is passing through his Aggressive Phase, right on schedule; it just couldn't be more normal and healthy" (23). The notion of "phases" that a child must pass through conforms to the conceptualization of normative temporality. Mrs. Strunk sees Benny's behavior as the "anarchy of nature," but Isherwood's derision toward these notions is evident—Benny's "play" is a perversion and totally unnatural in the realm of queer play (24).

The real anarchy of Benny's play lies in his disregard for and disengagement from other people and creatures. Any queerness that *might* be perceived in "the masculine hour of ball-playing" is erased because the children's ball-playing is a carefully detached performance, one they have learned from their fathers. Benny, joining the other children to dig a hole in a vacant lot, "spits on his hands and picks up the spade. He is someone or other on TV, hunting for buried treasure" (24). The imitation of some TV personality places Benny on the side of Baudrillard's consumer society, indicating by the consumption of his parents' television that objects "are always arranged to mark out directive paths, to orientate the purchasing impulse towards *networks* of objects in order to captivate that impulse" (Baudrillard 27). Isherwood further observes, "These tot-lives are nothing but a medley of such imitations. And soon as they can speak, they start trying to chant the singing commercials" (24). Consequently, children's play in the novel is always in imitation of something unnatural and always placing them in their parents'

destructive network.

In order to escape this seemingly inevitable network of consumption, reproduction, and violence toward nature, one must fully embrace the possibility of death. I say "possibility" because at the end of George's day, Isherwood only conjectures that he dies. Or, as Bergman again highlights in reference to Isherwood's normalizing of homosexuality, George's "death is not the wages of sin, a penalty paid for being gay. Instead it is a quiet, gentle, painless death—the 'good death' we believe granted only to the virtuous, and the biological death that all mortals must eventually suffer. In this remarkable ending, Isherwood plays deftly with the requirements of the gay novel, simultaneously recognizing and rejecting them" (207). The requirements that Bergman references are the previously accepted literary trope that a gay male character must die a violent death, usually via suicide or overdose, at the end of the novel. It is an important revision, and much of Isherwood's novel refocuses the camera's gaze by reassigning it to the homosexual. The critique of "deviant" ways is relocated in *A Single Man*. The homosexual is given the chance to disparage and condemn the perverse and destructive ways and ends of the breeder majority, the living dead, further indicting them by transmitting the responsibility for apocalypse to them. It is not enough for Isherwood to say their fixation on futurity through reproduction is futile; he must also acknowledge that their consumptive, restrictive patterns and their ecologically destructive actions are ridiculous and potentially hazard to every other person who lives on Earth.

Lest we assume Isherwood is embracing the image of the apocalyptic homosexual, who in traditional narratives of the queer *had* to die at the conclusion, let us recalls Sedgwick's words in *Epistemology of the Closet*: "…the phobic narrative

trajectory toward imagining a time *after the homosexual* is finally inseparable from that toward imagining a time *after the human*; in the wake of the homosexual, the wake incessantly produced since first there *were* homosexuals, every human relation is pulled into its shining representational furrow" (128). That is, to envision no homosexuality, or no queerness, is to envision an end of all human beings, and in my estimation, either a total recovery of natural spaces or the total destruction of them. That is certainly permissible to George. He has already accepted the end of man and the natural world at the hands of an irresponsible population. His final gesture is to acknowledge fully the end of life and become "now cousin to the garbage in the container on the back porch" (186). If this sounds fatalistic, that is because it is.[20] Isherwood has already repeatedly pronounced the final destruction of nature and its resources at the hands of overpopulation. Akin to garbage, the human is capable only of wasting in the end, and must, like the waste created by humans, "be carted away and disposed of, before too long" (186). George is thus implicated in creating waste by *merely existing*.

But that is if one assumes the novel's end is also George's. Isherwood cleverly leaves George's death up to speculation as a means of reversing the conventional homosexual death. Isherwood quips that George's death this night is "wildly

[20] In a rather flippant review of the novel, George Greene professes, "One grows tired of the sentimental assumption that inversion is an absolute prerequisite for any sense of—and share in—the nightmare of mortality. It is not George's bitchy asides and sensual reveries which make him moving as well as irritating. It is those moments when he escapes from the tyranny of the self. […] It is fitting that we never know his full name. Neither does he" (53). What Greene seems to be getting at is that George's death, if it occurs, is a direct result of his "inversion" and should not hold too much weight with readers. An escape from the "tyranny of the self" is, essentially, death, and Greene grants it to him at the same time he discounts it. An anonymous review of the novel seems to echo this same conclusion, that "George is a prisoner of his perverse sexual appetites; Mr. Isherwood constantly describes him in terms of purely physical functions, and George thinks of his body as an alien structure over which he has only nominal control. The problem of finding a new partner, for instance, is going to involve far more than wariness and diplomacy than is ever required of a man courting a woman" ("Prisoners of the Perverse" 123). By taking agency away from George, as a man, a homosexual, a bereaving loved one, the reviewer is stripping him of his own personal experience.

improbable," but he speculates that George's heart condition (because this is what he is describing) began the moment he "walked into the Starboard Side and set eyes for the first time on Jim, not yet demobilized and looking stunning beyond words in his Navy uniform" (185). Before George can be released into the Majority made up of the Dead and join Jim, he is trapped in the same daily cycle that condemns the breeders. Isherwood puts him in the same bed in which he begins the novel, and one could flip back to the beginning of the novel and start all over again. His visions, it seems, are for nothing, and Isherwood cannot make George's vision redemptive since heteronormativity, the certainty of the breeders' apocalypse, and their environmental wastage is insurmountable. Whether George lives or dies is actually irrelevant. Neither option is liberating for George. Death is waste, and life is a trap.

CHAPTER II

"YOU SHOULD BE A BIG ENOUGH GUY NOW": HOMOSOCIAL BONDS AND WILDERNESS MASCULINITY IN KEN KESEY'S *SOMETIMES A GREAT NOTION*

> Love—and all its complicated ramifications […]—actually does conquer all; Love—or the Fear of Not Having It, or the Worry about Not Having Enough of It, or the Terror of Losing It—certainly does conquer all.
>
> —*Sometimes a Great Notion*

> [H]e had been so concerned with a simple but difficult Becoming that he had taken no thought of Being. –Wallace Stegner, "Born a Square"

> Civilization is not, at they often assume, the enslavement of a stable and constant earth. It is a state of *mutual and interdependent cooperation* between human animals, other animals, plants, and soils, which may be disrupted at any moment by the failure of any of them.
>
> —Aldo Leopold, "The Conservation Ethic" 1933

In *Sometimes a Great Notion*, Ken Kesey's 1964 novel, Leland Stamper receives a postcard from his hometown of Wakonda, Oregon written by his cousin Joe Ben. The postcard arrives in the midst of a botched suicide attempt at Yale. Its postscript is written, "showing black and blacker, large and larger than all the rest of the message," by Leland's half-brother, Hank (69). The postscript reads, "*You should be a big enough guy now, bub*," and Leland fixates on the implied challenge to his masculinity (69, 70). After a mention of Hank's wife, Viv, Leland imagines the idea of his brother married "was so ludicrous that I found some actual humor in the idea, enough to give me a real laugh and

the courage of contempt besides," indicating his apprehension in picturing his brother in a stable, heteronormative relationship (70). The letter also contains a request for Leland to return to Wakonda to help with the family's logging business because the rest of the town's loggers have gone on strike. Leland, perceived as the effete, educated man living in the East, is the Stampers' last hope in filling the work quota for the Wakonda Pacific Lumber Company. But Hank's inference that Leland is a "big enough guy now" reveals he believes just the opposite—Leland is, in comparison to his half-brother, underdeveloped, overly cerebral, and incapable of the strenuous work required of a logger. While Leland later proves his brother right to some degree, he, as well as Hank and their father Henry, frames his notions of masculinity in terms that emphasize physical strength, competency in work, a familiarity with and desire to dominate the natural world, an apparent and strenuous heterosexuality, and fierce competition in the transmission of sexuality, gender identity, and labor.

The novel primarily surrounds a logging strike in a small Oregon town. In this chapter, I focus almost exclusively on Hank and Leland's narrations, but Kesey's multi-faceted narrative lines extend back several hundred years and across numerous characters, including: Indian Jenny and Simone, the two town prostitutes from very different backgrounds; Jonathan Bailey Draeger, the athlete's foot-afflicted union leader; and the owner of Wakonda's laundromat and movie theatre, who commits suicide after learning he impregnates a local African-American girl. Tony Tanner explains, with all the novel's shifts in narration and its flashbacks, that "temporal arrangement is only important within small units," causing the novel to emphasize the actions contained in a

single day.[1] In fact, Kesey's "notes for the novel say, 'This book, this story, is the real story of one day, one very important and particular day chosen out of many days, many months, many years. The day Hank brings the boom downriver'" (Tanner, *Ken Kesey* 59).[2] This particular day, which provides the climax and main frame for the novel, finds

[1] Early reviewers of Kesey's second novel appear to misunderstand or merely ignore the underlying complexities of Kesey's world vision. Contemporary reviews, apart from maligning the novel for its ungainliness, highlight the characters' struggle for heroism in a decidedly unheroic time as well as the novel's tendency to push the boundaries of narrative, sequencing, mimesis, and theme. Irving Malin identifies the use of symbols such as the Oregon weather as indicators of "the 'great notion'—reality itself. The union, the community, and the family—all social institutions—distort reality by shaping it in limited ways; it is more complex and threatening than their simple 'conventions'." While Roger Sale contends that Kesey's characters are "embarrassing in their large scale triteness," he also points out Kesey's uses lore, which is "kept alive only by the anachronistic," at the same time he "is unsentimental indeed on the relations of a violent pioneering past with a tame and tasteless present" (609). Joyce Carol Oates accuses Kesey of eschewing the histories of Tom Jones and Tristam Shandy since, as she notes, Kesey "has tried to combine the robust, masculine, worldly novel of action with the kind developed most skillfully by writers such as Joyce and Virginia Woolf" (176-7). What can be taken from these reviews is the confusion and misunderstanding, particularly thematically and narratively, that *Great Notion* caused upon its publication. I take these reviews as signs not of the author's weakness or inability to prioritize but of his engagement with themes and characterizations that are often mutually exclusive. But since most of the criticism about Kesey's work centers on his first novel, 1962's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *Great Notion* has been largely ignored. Alternately declared by critics as clumsy, messy, unnecessarily long, and a lesser version of *Cuckoo's Nest*, *Great Notion* is a complex and sprawling novel of which critics seem to be more frightened than willing to undertake and give its due. Stephen L. Tanner, in his book-length study of Kesey's work, argues that the reason *Great Notion* has not been treated as much as *Cuckoo's Nest* is because it is too long, and a second or even third reading is required before "many intricately developed patterns are fully understood and appreciated" (*Ken Kesey* 55). Further, Tanner states that Kesey's "techniques are really not abstruse or obscure; there are just too many of them to take in on the first reading" (55). For these reasons, Kesey is "like a juggler with many things in the air at the same time," which necessitates careful reading, as Tanner prescribes, in order to uncover what he sees as the main motifs with which Kesey engages—suicide, rain, drowning, and the frontier (64). Indeed, Tanner misses a few others what I believe to be essential themes here, but his image of Kesey as juggler is an accurate one. In what follows, I will not only examine the themes that Tanner identifies but also a few I deem just as essential for understanding Kesey's most complex work.

[2] Linguist Scott Fabius reveals that men, when in same-sex situations, seek common ground and establish a status desirable to other men as a means of creating homosocial aspiration during various speech events (713). Fabius conjectures that "fidelity to the institution is characteristic of most if not all of men's homosocial groups" because "direct expressions of homosocial desire are located away from individual members to the group/institution," as a means of keeping the line between the homosocial and homosexual as demarcated as possible (699-700). In this context, Leland's desire to join Hank in taking the boom down the river is an expression of his commitment to the family's logging business and its taming of the forest, and by extension to Hank himself. In matching Hank's strength and competing with him, Leland attempts to create for himself a status that is admirable and desirable to his brother. It is for this same reason that Leland picks a fight with his brother but with one revision: knowing Viv is watching, Leland believes matching Hank's strength will win her, but in reality it is the approval of his brother that he seeks. To gain her approval, however, would diminish the purpose of Leland's slightly unsuccessful aggressive physical display. There is no clear winner in the battle, but Leland sees Hank as dominant, and "I did not intend to spend another dozen years in his shadow, no matter how big it loomed!" (Kesey, *Great Notion* 709). But approval from his brother can only come in the formation and approval of a homosocial group.

several of its main characters scattered around town: Henry is in the hospital after a felled tree tears off his arm; Joe Ben, Hank's closest cousin, is dead from drowning, having been pinned in the river under a felled tree; Leland and Viv have sex behind Hank's back, after which Viv departs from Oregon while Leland joins his brother on the boom, but only after the brothers have a bloody fight on the dock in an apparent attempt to impress and create sympathy in Viv. What appears to be a simple Freudian tale of the prodigal son (Leland) returning to his home to avenge the seduction and eventual suicide of his mother (Myra) by his half-brother (Hank) by seducing his half-brother's wife (Viv) amidst the hard scrabble life of the Oregon loggers is actually a complex narrative that challenges the themes of masculinity, heterosexuality, the frontier, and man's engagement with the natural world.

Little has been said about the symbolic value of the natural world and its connection with sexuality and gender politics in Kesey's work.[3] For a novel like *Great Notion*, which uses the forest and rivers of the Pacific Northwest as its setting for an exploration of the relationship between men in the same family and work community, this seems hardly comprehensible. In fact, a 1971 interview in *Kesey's Garage Sale*, conducted by Ralph Krassner, the editor of the Whole Earth Catalog, reveals that Kesey engaged with gender and sexual politics and their relationship to the natural world when

[3] The profusion of work about Kesey and masculinity reveals more about the state of Kesey criticism than it does Kesey's literary output. The fixation on the hero theme in his novels reveals a desire to link Kesey's characters with the unquestioned "manliness" by which he presumably lived. The narrowness of these interpretations indicate an obsessive tendency in previous critics of Kesey's work to link an understanding of his personal life to his literature, and many pieces fixate on Kesey's escapades with the Merry Pranksters as a way of explaining the motifs in his fiction. While I do not advocate criticism that is entirely stripped of authorial biography, I believe the reliance on Kesey's biography as a tool of explanation for his fiction implies a general discomfort with engaging with what is in my opinion some of his more problematical work. Therefore, in this chapter I examine *Great Notion* with a substantial reliance on close readings of Kesey's second novel. This is because up until this point, critics have largely avoided the words themselves.

writing *Great Notion*. Kesey describes the motivation behind the 1964 novel:

> Women's lib is the real issue in *Notion*. I didn't know this when I wrote it, but think about it: It's about men matching egos and wills on the battleground on Viv's unconsulted hide. When she leaves at the end of the book, she chooses to leave the only people she loves for a bleak and uncertain but at least *equal* future. The earth is bucking in protest of the way she's been diddled with; is it strange that the most eloquent rendition of this protest should come from the bruised mouth of womankind? (218)

Kesey could be referring to the frame of the novel: the story of the Stampers, the strike, and the insistence of Henry Stamper to "Never Give an Inch" is framed by Viv's perspective, as she flips through the Stamper family photo album. And since *Great Notion* lies in the very hands of Viv, a fact that can easily be forgotten in the dissonance and tangle of the other narrative lines, it is important to remember that hypermasculinity, although on the surface the most prominent virtue of the novel, can easily be eschewed to make way for queer possibilities, particularly those sanctioned in natural spaces.[4] It is not just Viv through which the novel's misogyny and misuse of the natural world is transmitted; it is also the earth itself.

On the surface, Kesey's formulation of manhood in *Great Notion* corresponds

[4] According to Tony Tanner, the brothers' manipulation of Viv "is not depicted as cruelty; if anything it is one of the sad results of that loss of ability to recognize and communicate with other people's reality which more than one American novelist has portrayed" (*City of Words* 378-9). In this estimation, *Great Notion* is much more about the failure, on the individual level, of human communication. *Great Notion*, to me, is much more about the other possibilities of human communication, including the exchanges with the natural world. Charles Bowden, in his introduction to the novel, makes a couple of relevant and apt points: "The book demolishes all the ways we have of defining life so it will become tame. Collectivism comes across as living death, individualism as actual death, resources are something disappearing as the family gnaws through the last virgin stand. The human world vanishes at times […] And the entire book is in the hands of a woman as she flips through a family album in an effort to explain the love and defeat she has witnessed and shared" (xiv). Such an observation places both the characters and the environment in which they live and work in a space where definitions, performances, and identities are constantly slipping away and being redefined.

with perceptions of masculinity held during the first part of the Cold War. The subject of Cold War masculinity is often framed in terms of the language of frontier mythology and the West.[5] Suzanne Clark points out, "Manliness as a heroic pragmatism and a discourse of identity located the national drama in the arena of last frontiers" (19).[6] Although nuclear narratives of the Cold War do not presuppose the genre of the Western, Clark argues, the image of the atomic bomb and the rhetoric of the "Cold Warrior," typified by the cowboy and soldier, became representative of Cold War masculinity. "[T]hose old fables" backed up "a new order," which is marked by a sustained hypermasculinity that "seemed not the politics of gender only because the politics of a gendered illusion kept it submerged" but an attempt at establishing "whiteness, maleness, together with American authenticity, as unmarked, neutral positions of superior reason" (15, 3). In addition to the assumption of white, frontier, American masculinity as the paradigm of the Cold Warrior, Kesey's notions of masculinity, "combined with figures like Norman Mailer, Hugh Hefner, and Ian Fleming, all of whom created masculine personas that offered the American public the possibility of avoiding being labeled 'pink'," are performed "by taking up acts deemed heterosexual," as Michael Meloy explains (13). For these men, "[e]xhibiting an open, exaggerated sexuality became an opportunity to validate one's

[5] Perhaps a little tongue-in-cheek, Wallace Stegner (himself included and Kesey as well) explains that the naïve Western writer (writers writing about the West) have a conundrum with which to deal: the fact that Western writers do not have a legitimate literary tradition from which to draw their influence as well as the dominance of larger cultural narratives that potentially limit their scopes ("Born a Square" 170). These narratives, Stegner argues, are uncomfortable for Western writers because they "specialize in despair, hostility, hypersexuality, and disgust. If only because of their youth, the several Wests continue to represent some degree of traditional American innocence" (171). I do not completely buy Stegner's assertions, but when I apply them to Kesey's work, I do find that *Sometimes a Great Notion* is infused with some pure and essential moments of innocence, while often devoid of the despair and hypersexuality that Stegner mentions. It is something to consider.

[6] The evocation of the term "frontiers" in the 1960s must call to mind John F. Kennedy's famous "New Frontier" speech given in 1960. Kennedy suggests each American become a "pioneer in the face of an uncertain future full of unprecedented danger and hope. He quotes from the Bible—"Be strong and of good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed"—in order to convey what he sees as the decade's and country's greatest necessity and virtue—authority and power.

heterosexuality," and their pronounced manhood, I would argue (13). That also means "to not participate in the sexual rhetoric of Joe McCarthy, Mickey Spillane, and Ian Fleming was to potentially render oneself unmanly" (13). In other words, "real" men of the Cold War era were noticeably heterosexual, sometimes aggressively so, dedicating their identities and genitalia to a rhetoric that supported physical assertiveness but not faint-heartedness. The Stampers, especially Hank and Henry, the self-made logger and businessman,[7] do not want to be viewed as "pink" so they throw themselves into filling a work quota for the Wakonda Pacific lumber company with no regard for the feelings of their fellow townspeople and strikers or any consideration for the overwhelming amount of work that must be completed by so few people. To do otherwise would be spineless.

While the physicality displayed by the men of the logging community is often

[7] It is through the image of the so-called self-made man that Kesey chooses, at least initially, to give his male characters their masculine mystique. In James V. Catano's study about masculinity and the self-made man, he draws on Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter* in order to argue that masculinity "is rule-governed practice […] a practice and maintained—culturally and individually—through and in terms of present rhetorical arguments" (2). Catano further engages with what he identifies as *doxa*, or the axiomatic elements of manliness, to explain that masculinity "is an oscillation or negotiation (as in negotiating a minefield) between a dominant mythic rhetoric and the particulars of a personal situation," in addition to recognizing the "deep irony" of the rhetoric of the self-made man which claims "to offer the ultimate in freely formed, self-created individualism, while it actually serves to establish a social subject, a set of behavioral patterns and expectations that are already prescripted, as it were" (3). Combined, these notions of the self-made man form a portrait of masculinity that is settled between the control of rhetoric and culture and the desire to fight back against that control. Surely, the concept of prescripting serves to classify the so-called "self-made man" as something hardly classifiable. But does Catano not suggest that, by remaining in a kind of purgatory between supposed self-formation and prescribed socialness, the self-made man is indeed at the command of the social order, whether it serves his interests or not? Indeed, Michael Kimmel, speaking of the men's liberation movement that coincided with the much larger Women's Liberation movement, states, "At its core men's liberation provided a coherent critique of the Self-Made Man; in its eyes, *he* was the failure. As a collection of do and don'ts, the male sex role was a recipe for despair; given what it took to be a real man, few, if any, men could live up to the image, and hence all men would feel like failures as men" (281). There is hardly room for autonomy in either Catano's or Kimmel's estimation of the self-made man, leaving those men who have labored under the illusion of having "made" oneself sadly mistaken. Also of note is their belief in the impossibility of a man being able to achieve the mythic freedom of the self-reliant man. If this self-reliance is the hallmark of the stoic and independent masculinity of the Western hero, there is little left to which he can cling. The solution to these problems, I would argue, lies in James Knapp's contention that Kesey is offering the sheer impossibility of a combined "vital individualism, whose price is personal isolation" and "a vision of the necessity of inter-dependence and mutual brotherhood" (398). One cannot survive in both modes. Instead, I see Kesey choosing the latter option as the mode through which his characters achieve self-sufficiency by affirming their homosocial links.

read by critics as Kesey's way of reinscribing a macho, pioneer mentality into a Cold War era American literature populated by flaccid and disempowered men, I read these moments erotically and queerly, underscoring their occurrence in the space of the forest as a necessary to the enactment of homosociality. Through his male characters in *Great Notion*, Kesey illustrates that stable masculine identities do not exist, and indeed, so-called manly men do not necessarily rely upon an exclusively heterosexual relationship with women to express their sexuality. But to take matters of masculinity and its relationship to the natural world for granted would be a mistake. A categorical stability for the manly man, his attitude toward women, and his associations with the resources and forces of the natural world does not exist, at least not unquestioned, in the forests of Kesey's Oregon. In *Studs, Tools, and the Family Jewels*, Peter Murphy explains, "If gay men represent undesirable male sexuality and straight men embody the only acceptable male sexuality, all men become victims of the language passively adopted to describe 'authentic' masculinity. This kind of language does not allow us to entertain the thought that there are alternate forms of masculinity to the heterosexual" (106). This includes, to my mind, forms like homosociality, for example. The notion of authentic masculinity, then, is a fraught one, one that forecloses the possibilities of alternative ways of viewing the world, including nature. As Barbara Ehrenreich points out in *The Hearts of Men*, the counterculture, of which Kesey is universally declared a member, was not simply "a male rebellion" (107). If the Beats "idealized defiant masculinity," then "the hippies discarded masculinity as a useful category for expression" (107). While Ehrenreich's evaluation of the counterculture as an "androgynous vision" might be slightly overstating the fact, there is something to her claim that "the counterculture reinforced the promise, from a new

psychology, of a richer life for those who could overcome their masculine hang-ups" (116). The "richer life," in the context of Kesey's novel, includes the opportunity for a queer resistance that takes place in natural spaces. At the same Kesey formulates characters who, despite being descended from a "[h]ard jaw, tendoned neck, deep chest […] stiff-starched, leatherbound, iron-cored patriarch," cannot unquestionably be called manly men (Kesey, *Great Notion* 17). The seeming contradiction of the two modes is unresolved in the novel, a way for Kesey to formulate a queer resistance to Cold War masculinity as well as domination over the natural world.

The archetypal figure of the Western hero, independent, self-made, and free of women, is a useful frame through which to examine Kesey's characters, but I caution against the wholesale adoption of such figures as exemplars of masculine codes of identity. In fact, Kesey revises mythologies of the Western hero and the narrative of positive technological progression. He sees the progressive West as consequential in the postwar period. Men are ineffective in both love and work, and their masculinities are constantly being challenged. By extension, the novel's treatment of women points to the troubling subordination and misinterpretation of nature and woman by patriarchal domination. The particular queer ecological aspects of *Great Notion* are manifest in the primacy of the male-on-male relationships and how they challenge not just heterosexuality as a fully realized and socially sanctioned identity but also the structure of the nuclear family and its production of children. While I do not wish to equate queerness with homosociality, I will acknowledge Eve Sedgwick's use of Rene Girard's conceptualization of erotic triangles in her pivotal study on homosociality in literature, *Between Men*. She argues that in literature that features romantic rivalry between men,

there is an "insistence that, in any erotic rivalry, the bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved" (21). First located in the figure of Myra and then in Viv, their competition over women reveals the same kind of triangulated desire Sedgwick introduces. Women have their own particular function in the homosocial relationships.[8] Sedgwick suggests that the "bond of cuckoldry" emphasizes men's striving toward "satisfying relationships with other men," and women become "property" in a triangular exchange in which one of the men involved "requires a willingness and ability to temporarily risk, or assume, a feminized status" (50-1). That is, in love triangles, the woman becomes a secondary erotic consideration to the relationship of the men involved. Leland seeks to cuckold Hank and thus enter a deeper relationship with him, but it is Leland who gains the "feminized status" in the triangle. This relationship, Sedgwick suggests, forms a "potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual" (1).[9]

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[8] Also in this manner, Viv and Myra, both reluctantly Stamper women, are positioned as the property for which the men are competing while they are simultaneously displaying desire for each other. Their function in the novel is to off-set the homosocial possibilities of the male relationships at the same time they release the men from the willful knowing of their own sexuality. As long as Viv and Myra exist, Hank and Leland are "safe" from acknowledging their desires for each other. Barry H. Leeds finds "Hank is preoccupied with replicating Myra in Viv" while "Lee attempts to repay, in his incestuous relationship with his brother's wife, the injury done him by his brother and mother" (85). Leeds points out Kesey's obvious Freudian parallels drawn amongst the characters and their often incestuous relationships with one another, but he misses one of the crucial locations of desire—the brothers' competition over the bodies of both Myra and Viv in which neither man wins. Instead, in the closing scene of the novel, in scene which Leeds describes in "the essence of their vision and Kesey's that the constant potential for new beginnings is central to the dynamic process that is human life," the brothers go off together, leaving Viv an opening for escape (88). This, to me, is the pivotal scene of the novel, and the brothers, having chosen each other's companionship over that of the woman's, choose the homosocial and non-procreative over the heterosexual and consumptive.

[9] Sedgwick's evocation of the continuum is similar to the Kinsey Scale, which attempts to classify individuals on a sliding scale of 0-6 (heterosexual to homosexual) as a way of illustrating the variability of human's psychic reactions and physical experiences. As Alfred Kinsey famously argued in 1948's *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*:

> Males do not represent two discrete populations, heterosexual and homosexual. The world is not to be divided into sheep and goats. Not all things are black nor all things white. It is a fundamental of taxonomy that nature rarely deals with discrete categories. Only the human mind invents categories and tries to force facts into separated pigeon-holes. The living world is a continuum in each and every one of its aspects. […] The homosexual activity rarely conflicts

In *Great Notion* homosocial bonds function as the possibility of queer resistance—that is, resistance to the traditional narratives of childbearing and –rearing that often become naturalized in social narratives, and these bonds are always formed and can flourish away from the structured, domestic spaces ruled by women and in more masculine nature spaces, controlled and named only by men.[10] I would argue, then, that Hank and Leland's competition as well as their finally acknowledged embrace at the end of the novel is performed as a means of expressing their homosocial desire for each other, and especially Leland's for his brother. It is this expression, although it goes unspoken and even unacknowledged by the pair, which is manifested in the forest and river, the representative natural spaces in the novel. As Elaine B. Safer argues, the novel's abiding theme is the absurdity of the human condition in a "senseless universe" made up of multiple layers: "the metaphysical indicates that 'treacherous impermanence' of nature, whose rivers overflow all apparent boundaries on the water-soaked Oregon coast; the historical reveals that the memory of Hiroshima destroys heroic potential in a post-World War II society; the psychological shows the bizarre ramifications of an Oedipal situation […]" (230). Safer explains that through the motif of the absurd quest, the story of the

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> with their heterosexual relations, and is quite without the argot, physical manifestations, and other affectations so often found in urban groups. There is a minimum of personal disturbances or social conflict over such activity. It is the type of homosexual experience which the explorer and the pioneer may have had in their histories. (639, 631)

Both Kinsey's and Sedgwick's use of a continuum is suggestive of the fluidity of human sexual identity. Further, in *Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick furthers her work on the bonds of men by explaining:

> If such compulsory relationships as male friendship, mentorship, admiring identification, bureaucratic subordination, and heterosexual rivalry all involve forms of investment that force men into the arbitrarily mapped, self-contradictory, and anathema-riddled quicksands of the middle distance of male homosocial desire, then it appears that men enter into adult masculine entitlement only through acceding to the permanent threat that the small space they have cleared for themselves on this terrain may always, just as arbitrarily and with just as much justification, be foreclosed. (186)

[10] Consequently, I wholly disagree with Barry Leeds's observation that "What these characters have in common is an inability to break out of the predetermined identity pressed upon them by external forces" on the grounds that any notions of stable, predetermined identity are immediately questioned the instant *Great Notion* begins (65).

Stampers illustrates the very senselessness of any heroic effort. The natural world works against the Stampers, Safer claims, as does history, archetypal figures, and heroic mythology. "Kesey's continual movement from the ludicrous to the calamitous disorients us," Safer contends, making us "aware that we live in a bizarre, cartoon world" (237). This cartoonish-ness, I would argue, is exemplified by the ever-shifting and disorienting natural world itself, making its actions and reactions indicative of the queer condition of the novel.

As opposed to Isherwood's valleys and desert, the natural world in Kesey's novel is embodied in the forest and the river. These spaces rule the ordering of Wakonda's life. The site that Hank, Leland, and Joe Ben have cleared for themselves in the forests allow for the expression of their homosociality and their perceived masculinity.. Also, through descriptions of the rising river, Kesey emphasizes human being's inability to control and police nature, which in turns dismantles the notion of naturalized human dominance. From the fluidity of the "hysterical crashing of tributaries as they merge into the Wakonda Auga River," Kesey invites us to follow to the sight of Henry's severed arm—"*tied at the wrist, (just the arm; look) disappearing downward at the frayed shoulder where an invisible danger performs twisting pirouettes for an enthralled audience (just the arm, twisting there, above the water)*—and immediately introduces the reader to a unpredictable and disorienting world order (Kesey, *Great Notion* 1, 2). It is an order, in fact, that is marked and dictated by the very river that is the lifeblood as well as the bane of the community. The spaces of the forest and river allow the men to transgress (however limited the transgression is) the restrictive boundaries of heteronormativity and domesticity.

But as men in the lumber industry, the Stampers' relationship to the natural world is a loaded one, and it is not as simple as a matter of destroying or conquering nature. It is almost essential that "Nature undefiled" is the "inevitable setting of the Sacred Marriage of males," as Leslie Fiedler contends in 1948's "Come Back to the Raft Ag'in, Huck Honey." Fiedler's essay is one of the first to give credence to the male homosocial bonds in the American canon (148). The proximity of these homosocial bonds (though Fiedler does not actually call them such) does not reveal the search for a substitute for a female presence but rather the "isolation sought more or less consciously as an occasion for male encounters" (149). Their practice of clear cutting forests is certainly motivated by economic interests and the establishment of dominion over the rest of the Wakonda logging community rather than the spirit of conservation. The Stampers, as men engaging with and utilizing natural spaces (specifically the forest), are illustrative of the connection between the meaning of manliness and the domination of nature. In the introduction to the collection *Eco-Man: New Perspectives on Masculinity and Nature*, Mark Allister notes that there has been little said about so-called "masculinity" and "nature" except that "…when we are asked to name particular American men we associate with the term 'masculinity,' we don't usually name men who use their minds, but men who exhibit prowess in 'nature,' outdoors, in sports arenas, and 'through' nature, by being rugged and handsome" (1). "[T]o prove one's manhood is not to test oneself in nature but to destroy it," Allister further observes (3). This paradigm is useful in considering the performative aspects of masculinity and nature. If exhibiting masculinity means destroying and conquering natural spaces, the violence and devastation related to displays of virile masculinity is highlighted. Thus, to prolifically reproduce, that is, to

"prove" one's manliness, is to also damage and obliterate natural spaces and resources. While Hank, Joe Ben, and Leland want to outwardly display their manliness by chopping down trees, taming nature, and objectifying and using women for their own pleasures, their relationships with each other highlight a different and perhaps dormant desire—the desire for queer resistance and for homosocial bonds.[11]

Important also to Kesey's portrayal of work and the homosocial bonds between men are the spaces of the forest and the river and the connection these spaces have to the logging industry. In her work on masculinity in the Western extractive industries, Nancy Quam-Wickham declares, "we need to acknowledge the centrality of work in the construction of the legendary manliness of the western extractive workers" (103). Focusing on the men who "conquer nature" through their occupations in mining, logging and oil-rigging, Quam-Wickham outlines the various initiation rites and discourses used by men in these industries to illustrate that the industrialized West is a particularly gendered space, just as the mythic savage West.[12] The emphasis on the physicality of

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[11] In his essay on the meaning of Mount Rushmore and sexuality in the establishment of the republican landscape, Peter Boag suggests that the "Founding Fathers" sanctioned heterosexuality and a patriarchal gender system as the "natural" social organization in the new republic, while they simultaneously contained within themselves "hidden meanings and secret opinions" (borrowing from Aldo Leopold's characterization of mountains) that ultimately queered their selves and their histories (42). What Boag reveals in his essay is that the unlucky in love and childless George Washington, "Abraham Lincoln and his bed*fellow*, Theodore Roosevelt and his cow*boys*, and of Jefferson and his yeo*men* undermine the sexual and gender expectations of the republican landscape of the West" (52). In this manner, "idealized democracy and heterosexuality reinforced each other," leading to the ill-begotten justification for westward expansion as well as the monolithic and false formation of the Founding Fathers (53). Boag suggests that early republican notions of naturalized sexuality helped form the bulk of American domestic policy in the early centuries, causing the following paradigms: "The masculine that inhabited the public realm sought to transform natures or wilderness into fruitful farms and productive towns. Although the feminine also had in mind converting nature and the wild, it did so only to the point that these might provide a refuge for domesticity" (48). Here is a definition of masculinity that is dependent upon the articulation of the feminine.[11] The constant fluctuation between masculine and feminine as well as myth and reality in the formation of the American republican, pioneering spirit makes itself unstable, nebulous, in constant motion in and out of definitive classification.

[12] The main challenge to the virile manliness that Henry represents comes in the form of a man's relationship to his work and his work associates, especially when the work is decidedly gendered masculine. Peter Boag's book *Same-Sex Affairs: Constructing and Controlling Homosexuality in the*

work as well as male solidarity resulted in masculine identities that were not "some social construction of collective gender identity serving to uphold male hegemony" or "simply a personal quality distinguished by certain characteristics" but rather as a means of expressing one's "identity and authority as men in both body and spirit" (95). Indeed, in describing the way the men work together, Kesey reveals a kind of spiritual engagement with the work as well as the forest: "they communicated with the unspoken language of labor toward a shared end, becoming more and more an efficient, skilled team as they worked their way across the steep slopes" (Kesey, *Great Notion* 567).

The stereotype of the uber-manly lumberjack developed alongside the move toward virility in the production of homosexuality.[13] In fact, one of the most famous

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Pacific Northwest outlines the homosexual subculture of the transient labor force at the turn of the 20th century. This "same-sex sexual subculture" was the subject of middle-class distrust and scrutiny as sexual deviance was often associated with the immigrant, non-white working classes. What's more, Boag claims a direct correlation between the emergence of Portland's modern, urban gay subculture with the homosexual happenings in the rural spaces of the regions. Although the study itself does not match up with the historical period of *Great Notion*, I believe that observations culled from Boag's study can help explain the homosocial ethos behind the Stamper clan's associations. The association between the homosexual subculture and the work they did is significant because without the labor involved, the communities would not have been formed. Within these communities are the interpersonal relationships between those known as jockers—the older, more experienced men within the transient laboring communities—and the punks—the younger men or boys in need of guidance. While the jocker-punk relationship necessarily included physicality, as Boag explains, it often went beyond sexual gratification: "The emotional awards of the teacher-apprentice relationship or even the basic warmth and compassion could be gained by both jocker and punk provided safety and protection as well, giving boys themselves significant reasons unrelated to sex to submit to or even initiate these alliances" (35). While I am not arguing that explicit sexual acts occur between the brothers, I do contend that their relationship takes on dimensions of the jocker-punk relationship, a Hank acts at the teacher to Leland's apprentice. That this pedagogical relationship takes place in the woods is doubly significant: first, as a same apart from the domesticity of Jan and Viv, the woods are an exclusively male and a seemingly masculine space; and secondly, the cover the forest provides, away from the policing eye of mainstream society, a space for these relationships to safely develop and flourish.

[13] The movement began as a way for homosexuals, so long associated with effeminacy and weakness, to express their masculine sides. Marked by the embrace of stereotypically macho representations—the cowboy, biker, lumberjack—the gay clones discarded the relaxed attitudes towards utilized by heterosexuals in favor of a deliberate and meaningful fashion. "Clones wore their garments in a self-consciously tight manner in order to enhance their physical attractiveness," explains Shaun Cole, whose article on the masculine stereotypes embraced by gay clones reveals that "[i]n adopting an image that was based upon a heterosexual macho images, gay men walked a tightrope between straight imitation and an interpretation that could identify them not only as real men but as real *gay* men" (129). The macho man presentational style was one of simultaneous self-defense and seduction, and it caught on not only in the gay subculture but also in popular culture.

homoerotic, fetish artists of the twentieth century, Tom of Finland, often used the image of the lumberjack in his work. Tom of Finland's lumberjacks, surrounded by the ever-phallic axes and either erect and rooted or felled trees, have barrel chests, rippling biceps, strong jawlines, long, muscular legs, and shapely buttocks. Their gigantic members are outlined by tight-fighting jeans that are in turn tucked into thigh-high work boots, and those who actually wear shirts wear the standard plaid flannel. Indeed, Tom of Finland's fetish images are idealizations of the gay macho men, but they signal a marked trend in the representation of homosexuals. The bodies of Tom of Finland's subjects are, according to Micha Ramakers, "reminiscent enough of reality to be credible, but just far enough beyond that reality to form a nigh unattainable ideal" (72). Lumberjacks represented the attraction of working-class masculinity, and Tom of Finland "focused mainly on the 'natural' bodies such men possessed, but that would be rapidly extend to the fetishization of working-class dress codes" (128). In this way, the production of a macho homosexual identity adopted the conventions of that which had already been classified as masculine. And indeed, the men of the Stamper clan appear to be clones of one another. "A horde of kinsmen" greet Leland when he arrives, "their plaid shirts, spike boots, and manly physiques bespeak the logging trade; a uniformity of features indicates they are all members of the same family, for they all boast noble Roman noses, sandy-brown hair wafted free by the fragrant northern breezes, and iron-green eyes. They are all ruggedly handsome" (Kesey, *Great Notion* 86). They all look alike, but here it does not seem to be merely an incident of genetic relationship: their relational bonds with one another and their work cause them to not only dress alike but to carry themselves the same physically.

Kesey uses homosocial relationships between men (namely, Joe Ben and Hank (despite the fact they are both married), Hank and Leland, and Leland and his roommate and possible lover, Peters) to dismantle and discount the presence of heterosexuality and reproduction in the novel. In particular, the forest and the river play important roles in the allowance of homosocial relationships, but both spaces also amplify the fraught association humans have with the natural world. It is through such natural images, and those of the animal world as well, that people desiring to somehow tame or conquer nature learn their folly and that Kesey reveals the gendered politics of his characters connection to the natural world. By using birds and other animal images to describe various characters, Kesey demonstrates the interconnectivity of the natural and human world as well as using quite revealing descriptors.[14] The Wakonda Auga, often aggressive and rapacious, "roams the fields like a glistening bird of prey" (166). While Hank refers to Viv as both "chicken" and "kitten," Leland describes her as "the wildwoods flower," illustrating the different way the brothers view her—to Hank she is a pet and smaller being that must be cared for and to Leland she is decorative, exotic and other. Viv sees herself as "one of these *carrion-bird* people. Like a magpie or a raven. Somebody…just interested in picking at the purple places in people's past, she'd say, not at their healthy places, just at their hurts" (494-3). Myra is evocatively associated with a caged songbird, beautiful but trapped. The honking of the migrating geese haunts Hank, and he craves the tenderness and proximity of the cow when he milks her. Leland, himself described as an owl, asks his father during a foxhunt, "Don't you think a poor

[14] Indeed, Kesey's philosophical turn, described by Barry Leeds as "clearly existential," questions human's relationship to Nature, and thus to Death and Time and the world around them (63). Gilbert Porter, arguing that "Kesey has not written a mere Aesopian fable here," points out that "he has employed animal nature to probe human nature" (53).

dumb beast has the ability to recognize the same cruel world as the drunk? Don't you think that fox down there has just as many demons to escape as the wino?" (289). We, as humans, are intertwined with the natural world, Kesey argues, no mater how we choose to form that relationship.

The nearly primeval forest, then, often intimidates the Stampers, causing them to attempt to frame nature in manageable units and controlling it in their own manner. The classical division between civilization and wilderness is, for James Knapp, enacted by Kesey's opinion that "nature was an alien presence that must be transformed by the arts of civilization before it could serve a human purpose. His aim was not to build the mines and mills and cities of the earlier dreamers, but his starting point, like theirs, was the assumption that nature must be mastered by human technology" (406). Kesey is fully aware of the human impact upon the natural world, and particularly the forest in *Great Notion*. As Michael Drout points out, Hank "never wavers in his determination to reduce the chaotic independence of trees to the controllable, useful substance of wood," but as fast as Hank and his family can basically clear-cut the forest, it is "always regenerating itself and encroaching on Hank's world" (135). Drout's description brings to mind the never-ending work of Adam in the Garden of Eden since Hank's toil is seemingly nonstop. But there will come a day when the forest will be totally depleted. For the time being, though, the forest is a space for the enactment performative masculinity where attempts at conquering nature can be made in the view of other men.

Symbolic of the force and unpredictability of the natural world and the absurdity of attempted human dominion, the Wakonda Auga River holds great influence over the community of Wakonda, and any human attempts to tame or manipulate the river go

horribly awry. As Stephen Tanner argues, "The river and the ocean represent the forces that erode individual strength and induce despair and surrender" ("Labor Union" 17). But I would take this observation one step further by arguing that it is the force of water with its fluidity and its ability to permeate and drown the human body that affects the hubris of men who believe themselves impervious to the forces of nature. The river is both active agent in men's destruction and passive receiver of the same.[15] Suffering from athlete's foot, Jonathan Bailey Draeger, the head of the union, believes a man can slowly rot "like a corpse" from the incessant moisture of the famously rainy Pacific Northwest, and he thinks, "It's certainly no wonder that this area has two or three natives a month take that one-way dip—it's either down your blasted self or not" (Kesey, *Great Notion* 3). The title of the novel is drawn from the blues song "Good Night, Irene," which contains the line: "Sometimes I get a great notion/To jump into the river…an' drown." The river and the moisture in the air appear to have some kind of hypnotic effect on the residents of Wakonda. It is a land "*saturated* with moist and terrible dying," enough to drive men mad (29). Considered by earlier settlers a "Highway of Water," the river seems to have an ability to skew the residents' sense of orientation: "She runs both directions, don't she? So maybe the river ain't carryin' the land out to sea like the

[15] Furthermore, the only home built on the bank of the Wakonda Auga belongs to Henry Stamper, and it stands as a fraught site of engagement with and opposition to the river. As the river eats into the riverbank, the house is beginning to crumble and fall into the water. A "two-story monument of wood and obstinacy that has neither retreated from the creep of erosion nor surrendered to the terrible pull of the river," the Stamper homestead stands, like Hank's severed arm and the extended middle finger, like a great "fuck you" to both the town and the Wakonda Auga (5). At the same time, Leland is amazed by the home's accidental beauty, the careful yet unintentional cultivation of the flowers: "The flowers that bloomed at random around the porch and along the sides of the embankment had obviously required great care and attention, but again there was nothing force or unnatural" (103). He sees the surrounding land as a "land for childhood frolic, with forests dark and magical and shady sloughs alive with chubs and mud-puppies, a land in which young and snub-nosed Dylan Thomas would have gamboled, red-cheeked and raucous as a strawberry, a town where Twain could trade rats and capture beetles, a chink of wild beautiful insane American that Kerouac could have dug a good six or seven novels' worth" (258). Leland's idealization of the Stamper homestead and its surrounding forest is significant because it illustrate the fine line between human manipulation and total naturalness.

government is tellin' us; maybe it's the sea carryin' the water in to the *land*" (4). The river and water in general are powerful forces of disorientation.

But it is essential that we remember the river takes Joe Ben's life, disrupting one of the most tender and attentive relationship in the novel—that between Joe Ben and Hank. Leland's first glimpse of Joe Ben's relationship with Hank begins thus: "Hank smiles after the lovable little gnome in a manner to betray the tender heart that beats beneath his rough exterior" (Kesey, *Great Notion* 87). Joe Ben is described by Hank as being "*that* way; probably one of the most accommodating guys in the world" (132). Using the description normally reserved for explaining the unspeakability of homosexuality (i.e., he's *that* way; he's like *that*), Hank realizes the once too-pretty and smallish Joe Ben is a delicate yet robust man.[16] Their relationship, after having been raised together, flourishes daily in the forest. They set out for work every day, spending the majority of their waking hours apart from their wives and in the woods toiling together to complete their task. Their relationship is, to my mind, the most fully developed and evidently close. When Joe Ben slowly drowns, trapped beneath a felled tree that has landed in the rain-swollen river, he and Hank engage in the most poignant and tender scene in the novel. It is, to my mind, the scene in which the greatest amount of human-to-human affection occurs. And perhaps that affection does not have a perceptible erotic component, it is worth noting that Joe Ben and Hank's attachment to each other is the most powerful in the novel. In a moment not only desperately life-affirming but also homoerotic, Hank performs mouth-to-mouth on the drowning Joe Ben, risking his own life to dive beneath the water to save his friend: "Then gulped another

[16] In fact, John Howard's 2001 study on the community formation of gay men in the South in the 20th century is entitled *Men Like That*.

lungful of air and plunged his face into the water, feeling with his lips until he found Joby's mouth…open in the dark there, open and round with laughing. And huge; like an underwater cave, it's so huge, like a drain hole at the world's deepest bottom, rimmed with cold flesh…so huge it could empty seas" (583).[17] Joe Ben takes the receptive role here, which is traditionally ascribed to women. The "kiss of life" that Joe Ben receives from Hank is not enough to save him, but Hank's desperation in this scene indicates his deep and abiding attachment to Joe Ben. Expressing intense grief at Joe Ben's funeral, Hank climbs into the casket and tries to rearrange Joe Ben's face into a more recognizable form. He takes the role of the grieving widow, displaying a devotion to Joe Ben even in death that is commendable in any relationship.

Described accordingly by Joe Ben, logging and the destruction of forests appears to be merely a matter of mere semantics:

> The whole notion of logging is *very* simple if you get onto it. It comes to this: the idea is to make a tree into a log and a log into a plank. Now, when it's standin' up vertical it's a *tree*, and when it's laid down it's a *felled tree*. And when we buck it into lengths of thirty-two feet an' them lengths are *logs*. Then we drag them logs acrost to where the truck drives 'em down to the bridge at Swedesgap where the government scalers cheat us an' then we take 'em down to the out mill an' dump 'em into the water. When we get enough of 'em in the water we drag 'em up into the mill and we cut 'em up an' we got planks, *lum*ber. (200)

Naming the functions of logging and giving the trees human-derived purposes are both ways of controlling nature. At the same time, though, the sight of felled trees disturbs

[17] In the film version of the novel, as Joe Ben receives breath from Hank, the two worry they will be seen by someone and the resuscitative breath will be mistaken for them kissing.

Joe Ben, and he confesses, "Always put me in mind of a graveyard […] You know, tombstones? Here lies so an' so, here lies Douglas Fir, Born the Year One, Chopped Down the Year Nineteen Sixty-One" (521). Giving the trees human characteristics—the trees have names, can die and be buried—allows Joe Ben to frame his sadness in terms he can comprehend and articulate. Since part of his initiation into manhood involves learning the work of his brother and joining homosocial logging community, along with the satisfaction of seeing a tree felled, Leland forms a complicated relationship with other men and their relationships as conquerors of nature.

Symbolically, Leland crosses into manhood the moment Joe Ben declares, "He's getting the *call*. He's hearin' the gospel of the *woods*. He's forsakin' all that college stuff and he's finding a spiritual rediscovery of Mother Nature" while Hank points out that Leland is only gaining the physical shape needed to work alongside the "real" men (251). Even if Joe Ben is overstating the matter, he illustrates an important division between the softness and femininity of the life of the mind and the muscular manliness of the world of work and the outdoors.[18] But even through all their efforts to "whup it," the natural world seems to fight back against the deforestation with all its weapons: "blackberries strung out barbed barricades; the wind shook widow-makers crashing down the high rotted snags; boulders reared silently from the ground to block slides that looked

[18] In *XY: On Masculine Identity*, Elisabeth Badinter illustrates initiation rites that aid the boy in becoming a man as having three characteristics: a duty to leave one's childhood, the needs for a series of trials, and "the father's nonexistent or unobtrusive role" (67-8). The trials, Badinter explains, "are comprised of three stages, each more painful than the last: separation from the mother and the female world; transfer into an unknown world; and subjection to dramatic, public trials" (69). A subset of these learning experiences is something Badinter labels "homosexual pedagogy" with engages with "the teaching of virility by the indirect path of homosexuality" (77). The purpose behind the teaching is that of imitation—a man copies another man he finds attractively virile in order to be like him. While the idea of homosexual pedagogy leaves a lot to be desired, Badinter's connection between rites of initiation into manhood and the separation of the feminine in favor of what she suggests is homosexual masculinity, but what I think is more evident of homosociality, is useful to examining Leland's immersion into the masculine world of the logging industry and his competition with his brother.

smooth and clear a moment before" (567). Leland is aware, when he makes this observation, of the harm they are doing in completing their work. In this way, the forces of nature seek to diminish man's hold on it, but the men do not quit because it is all they have to make them tough guys.

Additionally, the phallic symbolism of trees and the logging industry is not lost on Leland. In conversation with Viv, he jokes he using his education even while he's logging because "The cable and the log are not that dull […] not when analyzed in their truer, their *deeper* meaning, as sexual symbols. Yas. You must keep a *secret*, of course, but I am out here on a grant from the Kinsey foundation, doing research for a book on the Castration Complex of the Choke-setter" (493). Leland's reference to Kinsey and Freud signals his deep and abiding awareness of his *real* mission in Wakonda—the sexual conquest of his brother's wife and, by extension, his brother. His linkage between the work he does as a choke-setter and the Freudian theory of sexual difference is important here. The choke-setter's job is to attach a cable to a felled tree so the skidder operator can pull the tree to the collection area. Leland's association of a felled tree with a castrated penis is, as much as it might be obvious, at the heart of his motivation. Does Leland desire the absence of his own phallus so that he can make himself more female and, in turn, more desired by the male sex? The evocation of Freud's theory surely suggests this. Or is this merely a moment in which Leland is attempting to demonstrate his cleverness to Viv? Perhaps. But earlier in the novel, Leland makes another mention of Freudian complexes in relation to the mysteries of his bond with Hank, which suggests that his desire to claim Viv is motivated by something deeper than and different from heterosexual intercourse. "Certainly there were all the run-of-the-mill Freudian reasons

beneath my animosity toward my dear brother," muses Leland:

> …all the castration-complex reasons, all the mother-son-father reasons—and all especially deep-seated and strong within me because the usual abysmal longing of the sulky son wishing to do in the guy who had been diddling Mom were in me compounded by the malevolent memories of a psychotic sibling…oh, yes, I had numerous scenes working on these multi-faceted levels—and any one of these note-pad facts would have constituted reason enough to provoke vengeance in the heart of any loyal neurotic—but this wasn't the Whole Truth. (220)

What is the Whole Truth, then? Indeed, one of the scenes Leland is "working on these multi-faceted levels" is the sexual encounter between Hank and Leland's mother, "[t]hat tangle of arms and legs, sighs and sweat-wet hair telescoped through my bedroom peephole" (258). We must remember, too, the very real fact that Leland sees the naked body of his brother, and this is what touches off his apparent revenge plot. Leland's apparent subjectivity, then, is touched off by the glimpse of his brother's nakedness.

From the beginning, Leland, an intellectual from the East who, having been raised by a mother, is seen as queer, weak and unmanly. Leland has an attachment to his roommate, Peters, a relationship that Leland indirectly describes as being that of a husband and wife although it is in effect, at least according to Leland, a casual relationship.[19] Glimpsed by his father for the first time in twelve years, Leland is so thin and bedraggled that Henry doest not recognize him, forcing Henry to ironically caution his kinsmen against inbreeding:

[19] It is worth noting, and I do not think it is much of a stretch to suggest, that Peters and Leland's friendship resembles, in proximity and composition, the oft-cited queer friendship that of Shreve and Quentin in William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*. They are roommates at school and close confidantes. Leland is suicidal, like Shreve, and is wholly preoccupied with the occurrences of the past and of his familial home.

> Ain't I been sayin' till I'm blue in the face, "Leave *off* this diddlin' of your cousins and sisters an' the like an' get out an' us up some *other* women fer a change!" I'm sick 'n tired of all these freaks an' halfwits you been turnin' out. We cain't be inbreedin' all the time like a buncha damn *hawgs*! The family got to be *healthy* an' *strong* t' keep up the standards. I don't aim to tolerate no weaklings! No, b' gawd, I don't. We need examples by gawd, like my own boy, Hank there, like the stock *I* turn out. (89)

Viewed in this manner by Henry, Leland is the product of inbreeding, an unnatural offspring the loins of a diseased mind. Inbreeding, the result of reproduction gone awry, represents the ideology that not all heterosexual coupling is affirmative and that heterosexual coupling can in fact produce queerness. The irony is that Leland is Henry's progeny and so Henry is unwittingly naming himself as an unnatural breeder. But still, Leland is not a man, to Henry's mind. He is, though, "one of the sensitives," according to Joe Ben, in need of emotional support and friendliness.[20] In fact, with Leland's return to Wakonda, all matters of stable gender identity associated with work or lifestyle become moot.

Almost the complete opposite of his second son, Henry Stamper is the exemplar of stubborn and established masculinity in the novel. He declares hatred for "pantywaists"; he is an important and respected member of his community; he is a

[20] The anxiety surrounding Leland's queerness is much more pronounced in the 1970 film version of the novel. Preoccupied by the length of Leland's hair and his "hippie" attire, Henry, played by an aging and grizzled Henry Fonda, declares in turn that his son "comes back a daughter," that he "looked just like Rita Heyworth," and that he's become a "New York fairy." The hope is that the work will "make a man outta" Leland since he is such a disappointment to his father. Removal from the effeminate and intellectual East is absolutely essential to Leland "reclaiming" his masculinity. But the anxiety surrounding homosexuality does not end there. In the film's most elegantly executed scene, the one in which Joe Ben slowly drowns in the river after a fallen tree pins him there, Joe Ben expresses his concerns about Hank performing mouth-to-mouth on him. The fear is that Henry will witness the artificial resuscitation and believe the two are kissing. "I wouldn't like that one bit," says Joe Ben.

physically strong (though aging) man; and his outright stubbornness and aggression marks him as a man who does not tolerate weakness in anyone. "Hypervirility," Elisabeth Badinter claims, is a performative attitude that manifests itself in men who realize they are incomplete because it is impossible to reach a masculine ideal (133). I would argue that Henry's oft-repeated motto—"Never give an inch"—is a marker of his apparent hypervirility (Kesey, *Great Notion* 133).[21] The motto originates from a plaque hung above Hank's bed by his father, who painted the slogan over the words "Blessed are the Meek, for They Shall Inherit the Earth" (34). The presence and manifestation of a personal decree, especially one so frankly aggressive, is a sign that Henry is performing his virility. In fact, upon the arrival of the decidedly unmanly Leland's arrival, Henry outlines his prescription for masculinity: "Now to the problem at hand: who's gonna teach this yere boy to ride a motorcycle an' doodle a cousin an' all that sorta thing? […] Who's gonna learn him to shave with a ax blade? To nut a nigger? We got *tend* to these details. Who's gonna see to him gettin' a tattoo on his hand?" (91). A real man, to Henry, acts on his masculinity by having sex with his cousins, castrating black men, and picking fights.

There is no denying that Hank is a tough guy, at least on the surface. He serves in the Korean War, rides around America on a motorcycle after his discharge, picks fights with other men, gets arrested, and woos Viv, bringing her back with him to Oregon in order to be his helpmeet as he aids his father in the lumber business. But, as I have illustrated above, such things do not always make the man. Hank does not possess an unquestioned desire to dominate nature. Arnold Talentino aptly points out that "Hank's

[21] Badinter, borrowing from the chapter titles in Deborah S. David and Robert Brannon's *The Forty-Nine Percent Majority*, Badinter identifies the four imperatives that go into making the tough guy: "no sissy stuff," "the real male is a big wheel," "he must be a sturdy oak," and "Give 'em hell" (130).

sensitivity to the natural world is unmatched by any other character in the novel, although on the surface they might seem gentler, more sensitive, and more willing to 'give an inch' than Hank" (67). But far from being "soft" or "pink," Hank shows flexibility in his relationship to the natural world. His ability to recognize human impact on the other-than-human world is important to his formation as a man and as queer. Hank, as Boney Stokes, Henry's longtime friend, explains, "sees how the land lays…it just is not a one-man world, never was…no mortal man can long endure…" (639). What Drout sees as "[n]ot merely a demonstration of physical prowess," is "Hank's personal defiance of the river represents his struggle against the chaotic powers of nature," in what I would argue is Hank's performance of masculinity (134). And while Drout sees the river "Hank's most powerful and persistent adversary," I see it as an adversary against which Hank has no hope of winning because he is, after all, only a man (134). In one of the novel's most agonizing symbols, Leland describes Hank training for a swimming meet by incessantly swimming into the current of the river. In fact, as Leland reflects on returning to home, it is the image of his brother "his long, sinewy body diving into the river, naked and white and hard as a peeled tree" that is the clearest for him (77). In all his efforts of defiance, Hank's attempts at manipulating nature go unrealized.

One episode in particular seems to represent Hank's not quite contradictory tenderness and aggression as well as his understanding of and desire to dominate nature. Tunneling through a seemingly impenetrable berry thicket, Hank removes several bobcat kittens from their home in the thicket, conscious that their mother will miss them. Hank suffers scratches from both thicket and kittens, but his single-minded mission to own and cage those kittens overrides his physical pain. At once Hank is surrogate mother to the

bobcats, carrying them in his mouth by the scruffs of their necks, the penetrator of the blackberry thicket as well as disrupter of the natural processes of motherhood. When the river floods and drowns the kittens in their cage, Hank realizes, "It was like me and that river had drawn ourselves a little contract, a little grudge match, and without me knowing exactly why," forcing him to think that the river is after everything he thinks he owns (125). He seems to understand its variability and volatility, that "you can make the river stand for all *sorts* of other things," and "all it wants is its fair advantage" (126). But this does not stop Hank from empathizing with other entities from the natural world, particularly animals. Hank has a similar ambivalent relationship to animals when it comes to hunting. "Not that I've ever had much patience with the kind of pantywaist who says, 'Oh, *how* can you kill the cute little deer? How can you *be* such a brute and coward?'" Hank declares, but he still cannot stand to see the animals killed. Real men hunt deer without a thought for the animal's pain, and Hank declares himself, while not on the side of "pantywaists," unable to kill animals with impunity.[22] The seeming contradiction of this declaration shows Hank's simultaneous refusal and embrace of heroic masculinity.

It is this perceived heroic masculinity and the natural world that clings to Leland's impression of and desire for his brother. Consequently, Leland's own attempt at revenge is ultimately unsatisfying and without much consequence, illustrating the overarching motif of inadequate heterosexual couplings. The consummation between Viv and Leland means very little because, as Leland is surprised to discover, it does not make him into

[22] Again, Hank's relationship to animals and his empathy with their condition are represented in his tie to the migrating geese that haunt his sleep. Despite being awakened by their honking every single night, he manages to have some empathy for them. He imagines a lost goose's honking taking on an existential tone, as he wonders, "*Where is my world?* […] *and where in the hell am I if I can't locate it?*" (505). Slowly, Hank's feelings of the geese change from annoyance to compassion since "I didn't want [the goose] shot because he sounded like he was asking *Where is everything? Where is everything?*" (507).

another Captain Marvel, and Hank is "straightened out" by his brother. In this way, Viv is definitively used as the site through which the brothers express the desire toward each other.[23] When Leland locates his revenge scheme in terms of the natural world ("I needed to fell the tree that had been hogging my sunshine before I even germinated"), he is emphasizing, in his mind, the importance of the natural world to his relationship with Hank (223).

Interestingly, interspersed throughout the scene of Leland's sexual encounter with Viv is Hank's parenthetic account of swimming across the river to home when he discovers the boat launch gone. "Tired and beat are you are, you'll make it acrosst, you big stud swimmer you…" thinks Hank, evoking images of a swimming sperm (596). So again with the phallic imagery, he writes Peters to ask, " In these days when a man's courage hangs between his legs and can be read like a thermometer, do I hesitate going through with my plan because simple old masculinity doubts make me afraid to risk sticking out my courage to the screwing point?" (497). His writing purposefully rife with

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[23] When Leland blames his initial failure to act on his desire to claim Viv on "an impotence that could no longer be blamed on impotence," he is getting at the significance of his inability to act (591). The impotence is caused, I would argue, by his desire for his brother rather than any real sexual desire for Viv. And it is also significant that the act of their lovemaking does not occur within the narration; it is merely described by Leland as such:

> [W]e made love. The scene no longer needed the impetus of my contrived plot. I no longer moved the scene; the scene moved me. Quite simply, we made love. We *made* love. How pedestrian the words look—trite, worn, practically featureless with use—but how can one better describe that which happens when it happens? that creation? that magic blending? I might say we became figures in a mesmerized dance before the rocking talisman of the moon, starting slow, so slow…a pair of feathers drifting through clear liquid substance of sky…gradually accelerating, faster and faster and finally into photon existence of pure light. (595-6)

Leland continues thus for some time, and I quote this section at length because it gets at the utter sentimentality and diembodiedness of Leland's heterosexual encounter. It would be easy to read Leland's description as mocking of heterosexual coupling. Indeed, with no actual physical descriptors—no account of Viv's body, Leland's reaction to it or of the act *itself*—only Leland's never-ending chatter: "And consummated there a month of quick looks, guarded smiles, accidental brushings of body too open or too secret to be mere accident, and all the other little unfinished vignettes of desire… and, perhaps most of all, consummated the share *knowledge* of that desire, and of that return desire, and of the juggernaut advance of that desire" (596).

sexual imagery, Leland basically confesses his impotence in the face of a sexual encounter with a woman. Sex with Viv is always tied up in his desire to repay the seeming affront to Myra done by Hank. In this way, his inability to act on his desire for Viv directly correlates with the recognition of Hank's sexual prowess. While listening to Leland's jazz on the radio, Hank declares it "manure," to which Leland replies: "'Such a prejudice must limit you terribly.' And he said, 'Are we gonna be like that?' And I said, 'I should think you would want to at least exclude such things as the female sex from such a sweeping statement.' And he said, 'I should think this outfit snuggling her little tail up against me here would make a qualification like that pretty damned unnecessary, but, if you are goin' to be hard-nosed about it…'" (315). Here again, being "like that" implies being homosexual. To prove his heterosexuality, then, Hank invokes the body of his wife. He defines *not* being "like that" as having a woman in his bed every night. Leland's choice in music marks him as unmanly, since accordingly to Hank, it "sounds like the musicians all squat to pee" (314). The scene plays into the complexities of the definition of manliness in the novel, and evidently, Hank describes his masculinity in terms of heterosexual coupling.

Additionally, with Viv's escape from the forced domesticity of the Stampers and her marriage, there is another suggestion for the queering of family structures and heterosexuality. As Stephen Tanner explains, "The potential for feminist complaint is probably there. The world of the novel is distinctively a masculine one. Viv's sorrow at having no children is revealed, and the impression is strong that she is not entirely at home at the Stamper house. In the end she leaves in order to find self-fulfillment elsewhere. But despite these attempts to establish her character, she remains little more

than a counter or pawn in the conflict between the brothers" (*Kesey* 86). I disagree with Tanner's assertion that Viv is *merely* a pawn in the brothers' game since to suggest that Viv is not a fully developed character means that Viv is not given a full conscious and the ability to escape at the end of the novel. In fact, Kesey takes great pains to prove the misunderstanding and unhappiness in Viv and Hank's marriage. Says Hank to Janice, Joe Ben's wife, when Janice complains about "him not respecting Viv's secret spiritual needs and giving the poor girl a little more chance to be a wife": "Don't you mean a chance to be a nursemaid, Jan? I appreciate your good intentions but take my word: Viv is wife aplenty. If she needs to doctor something I'll get her a kittycat" (Kesey, *Great Notion* 183). Hank clearly misunderstands his wife's needs. What Hank sees as Viv's paltry attempts at becoming an "Informed Woman" is actually Viv's desire to live outside the imprisoning force of the male patriarchal attitude toward the natural world and by extension her "natural" duties to the men in her life. Viv suffers a miscarriage and her dreams of bearing children are remembered as "an ambiguous lump" (711). While she is saddened by her miscarriage, her subsequent childlessness should not be read as a rejection of the child-bearing but rather as a rejection of her marriage. It takes two to make a child, and Hank's failure to also produce a child should not be overlooked here. Indeed, Viv's escape from Oregon and Hank (as well as Leland) is an escape from the seeming stability of marriage and heterosexual consummation. It is a move toward empowerment for herself, a move to recapture that lost dreams of her childhood, which included the search for an ambiguous someone willing to accept her as herself.[24] And

[24] Leland remembers his mother Myra, who died by her own hand, as being imprisoned, caught as he is between the forest, "[t]hat green curtain" and "that steel-plated river" (140). In this manner, Leland relates his mother's body to that of the earth, associating her abuse at the hands of Henry with the abuse of natural resources: "*But who chopped the firewood and slopped the pigs and raised those apples from the crippled*

while Viv enables the homosocial triangle that connects the brothers, she is also the embodiment (as Kesey explains in the interview mentioned earlier) of the postwar Women's Lib movement.

The postwar discontent that permeates *Great Notion* also has its roots in not only in the nuclear panic of the 1950s and 60s but also the environmental destruction at the heart of warfare and the postwar population boom. "Don't you see it's just the same plain old horseshit as always," ask Henry, reticent to engage in the "bomb talk" (111). Hank, returning from combat in Korea, feels the restlessness and delusion of a country "off kilter." As he rides around the country on his motorcycle, experiencing the fresh air and open road, he nevertheless feels a kind of depression brought on by what he senses is destroying the country:

> Dammit, he'd just returned from a police action that had taken more lives than the First World War, to find the Dodgers in a slump, frozen apple pie like Mom useta make in all the supermarkets, and a sour stench in the sweet land of liberty he's risked his life defending. Plus an unusual foreign worry on the Average American Guy he'd just saved from the insidious peril of Communism. What the hell was wrong? There was a kind of bland despair and the sky was filled with tinfoil. What was wrong with people? He didn't remember people around Wakonda being so damned watered down, or so revved up either. "Those boys out West, they got style…grit." But as he pushed his face into the arid American

earth? And what kind of freak of optics lets a man see a space star of trillium beside a silver-gray step of fir, and not see the fly agaric growing there? How could one look at the dusty rose sun shining off the river and not see the slabful of gore with a tag tied to her toe?" (140). The association is an important one for the exploration of the "feminist complaint" in the novel. Indeed, Henry's misogyny is telling of the environment from which both Viv and Myra must ultimately escape. Thinking "women were the knotholes in slippery-elm logs," Henry boasts a version of masculinity that does not just exclude women from the advantage of subjectivity but also objectifies them in terms of nature.

wind and moved through Missouri, Kansas, Colorado without observing an evidence of style or grit, he had grown more and more uneasy. (171)

Enmeshed as it is in Cold War narrative of containment and postwar nuclear anxiety, the novel presents a vision of an America already on its way to total environmental depletion as well as complete human defeat brought about by the hubris of manly men who think they can subdue forces of nature. Mechanization has turned the comforts of home into a bizarre and readily consumable product. Men are becoming more and more impotent in the face of what Hank sees as "bland despair." Indeed, even men returning from combat do not receive the type of hero's welcome reserved for previous military engagements.

Leland's own sense of the country, then, centers on notions of temporality that can be construed as queer because they are non-progressive. Having escaped from the dull, cyclic and normative timing of the university, Leland embarks on a natural world that seems stripped of conceivable ideals of time. The forest and the ocean are for Leland without time, and his reason for coming to Wakonda is not because he cares about his future but desires to somehow retroactively capture his childhood and make right with his past. This back-looking is indicative of Leland's queered sense of time, and as he imagines his relationship with his brother, it moves into a realm itself without any time: "*We are joined, brother, shackled together for all our lives, just as the birds and the waves are immutably tuned together, in a song of patience and panic. We have been tuned thus for years, me piping and pecking after morsels while you crashed and roared*" (359). But, like Isherwood's George, Leland recognizes the timelessness of a nuclear apocalypse. The concept of total annihilation—of humankind, the natural world, and everything in it—erases the necessity for keeping track of time, making the temporality

of apocalypse slightly more queer than that which looks backward because it erases *all* possibilities of tomorrow. "Zap; that's all it takes. The little red button and *zap*," explains Leland. "Right? And this little button makes a definite difference in our world; in our generation, ever since we've been old enough to read, our tomorrows have been at the mercy of this button" (496). Leland's observation accompanies both Henry and Hank's discontent with the postwar world, but he takes it one step further—he applies his realization to his own conception of temporality and realizes that "someday" is not a realistic concept.

Seeing the hides of various animals displayed outside the Stamper home, Leland questions, "*Who trapped the animals and stripped the hides? In this world, in this day? Who played at Dan'l Boone in a forest full of fallout?*" (138). Questioning the viability of the hero motif as well as the ecological climate of the Pacific Northwest, Leland sees the "junk motif" of those living in the Northwest as dominant paradigm of the once monolithically great West. Amongst the "guns, paperback Westerns, beer cans, ash trays overflowing with orange peels and candy wrappers" lie the "greasy part of invalid machinery convalescing on coffee tables…Coke bottles, milk bottles, wine bottles" (141). Similar to the Starboard Side in *A Single Man*, the Sea Breeze Café and Grill with its "lipstick stain on coffee mugs; bleak array of candy; insomniac flies waiting out in the rain; a plastic penful of doughnuts; and, on the wall, above the Coca-Cola calendar, the methodical creaking creep of a bent second hand across a Dr. Pepper clock" is representative of the condition of the postwar world. It is, ironically put by Leland, the "perfect place for a man to sit and commune with nature" (563). Taken as a unit, these objects represent what are the seeming fallout of overproduction and overconsumption,

and undeniably the abuse of resources and the pollution association with junk. Success in America, Arnold Talentino reveals, "gradually became translated into more and more money for more and more things, so that now *success* usually means enough money for *excess*, conspicuous consumption" (65). It is a success that asks Americans to conform to "the machine-like system which seems to promise this success. To succeed one must be like a machine that can work with the machines that seem to produce success" (65). Kesey illustrates that one could become "poisoned from the processed environment, from the distorted food and language and building and feeling, and both have been apt satirists of Public Relations and other institutionalized lying" (Widmer 123). Conforming to the machine, to the institution, signaled not just a sacrifice of one's personal freedom but also an embrace of that which was environmentally destructive, namely the love of junk, the destruction of the landscape, the overconsumption of resources, and rampant reproduction.[25]

[25] Another useful way of looking at the social and environmental destruction of the postwar period is through the Combine, a symbol used by Kesey in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. The Combine, as interpreted by Daniel Vitkus, is "a vast system of machines and robots, engaged in a process of converting human flesh, imagination, and individuality to a machine-world of freedomless conformity" (73). Vitkus further suggests that *Cuckoo's Nest* "celebrates a 'natural' maleness which is placed in opposition to a domineering, emasculating representation of the feminine" (exemplified by the Combine) and that "Kesey's construction of nature and naturalness is clearly gendered in terms of a male strength and sexuality which he places in opposition to female power" (Vitkus 66, 77). Ignoring for the moment the homosocial and possible homosexual implications of the male relationships in *Cuckoo's Nest*, Vitkus claims what I see as an anti-ecofeminist reading, aligning naturalness with masculinity and male sexual prowess that develops in spite of a domineering feminine presence. But his invocation of naturalness opens up a whole new frame through which to examine not just *Cuckoo's Nest* but also *Great Notion*. I would suggest that the characterization of the Combine, supported as it is by the control of industrialization and mechanization, the inexorable power of female privilege, and the suppression of the pioneering spirit, is necessarily a heteronormative model. It is ultimately a misogynist symbol because it represents the castrating power of mechanized and feminized authority.
But perverse as it seems, the Combine is the naturalizing and normalizing force in the novel, and it represents the debilitating stupor of routine, the ecological destructiveness of reproduction, and the interruption of individual autonomy. "The mill," Chief Bromden explains during one of the ward's outings, "put me in a kind of dream, all the humming an clicking and rattling or people and machinery, jerking around in a pattern. […] [I]t reminded me somehow of the men in the tribe who'd left the village in the last days to do work on the gravel crusher for the dam. The frenzied pattern, the faces hypnotized by routine…" (Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest* 32). The hum and rattle of machinery is the symbolic effect of the Combine. Additionally, the Combine sucks in and devours citizens with factory-like efficiency, causing

what Bromden sees as:

> Or things like five thousand houses punched out identical by a machine and strung across the hills outside of town, so fresh from the factory they're still linked together like sausages, a sign saying "NEST IN WEST HOME—NO DWN. PAYMENT FOR VET," a playground down the hill from the houses, behind a checker-wire fence and another sign that read "ST. LUKE'S SCHOOL FOR BOYS"—there were five thousand kids in green corduroy pants and white shirts under green pullover sweaters playing crack-the-whip across an acre of crushed gravel. The line popped and twisted and jerked like a snake, and every crack popped a little kid off the end, sent him rolling up against the fence like a tumbleweed. Every crack. And it was always the same little kid, over and over.
>
> All those five thousand kids lived in those five thousand houses, owned by those guys that got off the train. The houses looked so much alike that, time and time again, the kids went home by mistake to different houses and different families. Nobody ever noticed. They ate and went to bed. (202)

In this oft-cited passage from the novel, Kesey associates the Combine with conformity, reproduction without thought or distinctiveness, the suburbanization that has achieved the efficiency of the environmentally harmful factory, and the playground that has been paved with crushed gravel. "Over and over" and "time and time again" along with the anonymity of the various children signal not just the monotony of the factory efficiency of the Combine life but also the mindless conventionality of the reproductive routine. The Combine, while misogynist in its characterization of women as the force of evil and mechanization, is more importantly a symbol of what threatens Cold War masculinity—the destruction of the environment, and by extension, autonomy.

While Kesey has the Combine represent the normalness of mainstream society, with its obligatory homes and children, he also valorizes the character of Randle McMurphy since it appears he has escaped the "civilizing" effects of the Combine. Bromden thinks, "Maybe he growed up so wild all over the country, batting around form one place to another, never around one town longer'n a few months when was a kid so a school never got much a hold on him, logging, gambling, running carnival wheels, traveling lightfooted and fast, keeping on the move so much that the Combine never had a chance to get anything installed" (78). Now trapped in the psychiatric ward, McMurphy's bombast and swagger and certainly his chauvinist attitude toward Big Nurse make him the hero of the novel. His attempts to free the other patients from the emasculating propensity of the Big Nurse's control often go horribly awry, but Bromden's assumption that McMurphy can outrun the effects of the Combine suggests the possibility for an alternative to the reproductive destruction wrought by the mechanization of the Combine's influence.

Interestingly, Bromden's description of McMurphy also brings to mind the footloose and always-on-the-fringe Neal Cassady, the man who was the bridge between Jack Kerouac's Beats and Kesey's Merry Pranksters. Raised on the periphery of society by his often-absent hobo father, Cassady learned the rudimentaries of sex and survival from older women and his father's male friends. In his adult life, Cassady bedded many women and fathered multiple children, but he never remained in one place for long. Arguably, his closest and most steadfast relationships were with other men, namely Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg. Craig Leavitt's pertinent interpretation of Cassady centers on his nebulous and ever-shifting sexuality and his ability to escape from the restrictive domestic situations. Leavitt connects Cassady to notions of masculinity in the American West and then revises them in order to illustrate that Cassady both embraces and adjusts them to fit his particular condition. Leavitt borrows from Will Wright the plotting of representative Western masculinity from the nineteenth century: "a lone hero with special talents (usually for violence) entering a community to which he is a stranger, defeating a villain or other evil that threatens this community, then becoming an accepted citizen of the grateful town, often sealing this new status by marrying a women from the rescued population" (223). Taken this way, both Leland and Hank could be considered a hero in the classic sense, but as Leavitt points out, the heroics of this century involved "passionate living" in which the existential hero finds it impossible to reconcile themselves to a stable concept of masculinity. What Leavitt's estimation illustrates, I think, is that *any* stable concepts of masculinity, particularly those based on classical notions of the hero in the West, are up for debate and revision. Cassady's aggressive masculinity and heterosexuality has been taken for granted for a long time, but what Leavitt's estimation illustrates, I think, is that *any* stable concepts of masculinity, particularly those based on classical notions of the hero in the West, are up for debate and revision. In the case of Cassady, whose heterosexuality and masculinity has often been taken for granted, passionate living often

As a landscape, the West of the post-World War II period cannot and does not offer the escapism that frontier mythology promised. As Charles Witke points out, Kesey sees the pastoral mode as no longer viable (20). In general, this is because of what I see as the illusion the wilderness and wide-open spaces of the West created in pioneers and in the builders of American democracy, but there are some matters of the pastoral that

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involved homosocial experience and homosexual encounters.

There are a few other important things about *Cuckoo's Nest* that are relevant to the present discussion. I mention this not because I think *Cuckoo's Nest* is the richer of the two novels and more deserving of attention, as previous critics have readily intimated, but rather because *Cuckoo's Nest* does hold interpretations of masculinity and its relationship to autonomy and nature that I find useful for examining the homosocial and ecology affinities in *Great Notion*. Kesey's first novel centers on a psychiatric ward run by the domineering and unforgiving Big Nurse and inhabited by the silent Chief Bromden, amongst others. The boisterous, outgoing, and virile Randle McMurphy enters the ward and attempts to subvert the order established by Big Nurse, but he is finally subdued and punished with a lobotomy. The operation leaves him an invalid, and in the last scene of the novel, in a mercy killing, Bromden smothers McMurphy with a pillow. Robert Forrey claims, "[N]o psychologically informed reading of Kesey's novel can ignore the repressed homosexuality that seems to pervade it" since so much of the novel takes place in spaces inhabited almost exclusively by men, and McMurphy is preoccupied with asserting his sexual potency to prove that he is indeed a man (229). In fact, Forrey claims that *Cuckoo's Nest* is "overpraised" by male critics and should actually be maligned because the novel is "conservative, if not reactionary, politically; sexist, if not psychopathological, psychologically; and very low, if not downright lowbrow, in terms of the level of sensibility it reflects, a sensibility which has been influenced most strongly not by the Bible or a particular literary tradition as much as by comic books, particularly the Captain Marvel variety" (222-3). Further arguing that the novel should not be associated with sixties counterculture because it is "much more representative of the older, alcoholic, he-man, rather than the newer, drug, hippie culture," Forrey believes that the "values of Kesey's novel are not unlike those in the work of Hemingway and Steinbeck," those uber-males of American literature (223). Indeed, Forrey's critique is dated and not unproblematic, but his invocation of Hemingway and Steinbeck illustrate exactly my point about the state of Kesey criticism—it is obsessed with reinforcing a representative he-man-ness in analysis that pervades discourses about men who take on social or natural orders that are ostensibly detrimental and restrictive when it comes to the individual. Like wise, Leslie Fiedler contends that Kesey, whom he labels the "Psychadelic Superman," is very much under the influence of the comic book in the formation of his characters as well as his writing style (*Return of Vanishing America* 184).

But Forrey's mention of the brow-level of *Cuckoo's Nest* and his observation that comic books might have influenced Kesey's sensibility signals something essential about the formulation of masculinity and its relationship to the archetype of the hero: the formulation of heroic masculinity often took its cue from popular and pervasive images, recognizable by a large portion of the American population. It is crucial that such comic book heroes as Captain Marvel (a figure Kesey invokes repeatedly in *Great Notion*) and Superman found their way into popular imagination in the Cold War period.[25] In 1992's *Gunfighter Nation*, the last in the trilogy, Richard Slotkin identifies the Frontier as a powerful and useful symbol for "a vivid and memorable set of hero-tales—each a model of successful and morally justifying action on the stage of historical conflict" (3). Slotkin stresses the relevancy of frontier myths, the inevitability of an immediately recognizable and applicable symbol, with its attendant discourse, for Cold War America. It is the "hero-tales" that interest me most here because they are, as Slotkin aptly points out, some of the most pervasive and vital discourses of the time. It is through the hero-tale that the nation receives its acceptable behaviors and its ethical recommendations.

remain legitimate.[26] Stephen Tanner, in his article "Labor Union Versus Frontier Values in Kesey's *Sometimes a Great Notion*," argues, "Kesey is interested in the force of the self-reliant individualism of the Western frontier (and of his own ancestors), which he finds disruptive but nevertheless desirable in contemporary American society" (16). Also, "The hero must learn that frontier individualism has its expense and excesses," at the same time "the union members must learn that the cooperative communal aims of collectivism go awry when they ignore the importance of personal strength and initiative" (21).

Described by Jonas Stamper as "volatile," the westward trek "sounded good on paper," but the illusion of the open and encouraging frontier is quickly subsumed by the reality of illusion of man's ability to make some kind of permanent mark on the natural world (23-4). Pamphlets tout Wakonda's positive but ultimately illusory characteristics: "Where (the pamphlets had informed him) A Man Can Make His Mark. Where A Man Start Anew. Where (the pamphlets said) The Grass is Green And The Sea Is Blue And The Trees And The Men Grow Tall And True! Out In The Great Northwest, Where (the pamphlets made it clear) There Is Elbow Room For A Man To Be As Big And Important As He Feels It Is In Him To Be!" (23). What Jonas finds is that there is "something" about the land that makes a man feel small, that "The town? It may grow, but abide? It may grow and spread and proliferate, but abide? No. The old forest and land and river

[26] In the introduction to *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*, Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erikson do a reading of the 2006 film *Brokeback Mountain*. They mention that queer ecological politics converge in the film in the fact that Ennis and Jack are shepherds, making their story essentially pastoral; therefore, "the idealized, bucolic 'naturalness' of pastoral homoeroticism calls into question the idea that heterosexuality is the only 'natural' sex around" (4). In "The Queer Politics of Gay Pastoral," David Shuttleton illustrates how the pastoral mode has been adopted and revised by gay authors through the ages. Significant to this project is Shuttleton's assertion that writers like Whitman sought "the recovery of an Ur-masculinity" as a ways to escape "a claustrophobic domestic space of a demonized, oppressive middle-class femininity" (139). Indeed, even if the pastoral may be facing invalidity in the 1960s in the United States, this point of Shuttleton's points out a possible way for adapting and adopting the pastoral.

will prevail, for these things *are* the earth. But the town is of man" (25). If masculinity is predicated upon man's ability to shape and dominate nature, then the Stampers are unable to abide by this dictate. They realize this, perhaps too late.

Indeed, Kesey's pioneers, the men and women who bring the Stamper clan West to Oregon, are not the mythological heroes and stalwart missionaries who traditionally appear in idealized tales of westward expansion.[27] They are partially impotent and given to impermanence both in their personal and professional lives. Jonas Stamper, Hank's grandfather and progenitor of the Stamper clan of the novel, damns the entire family by declaring they possess the "*Curse of the Wanderer; curse of the Tramp; bitter curse of the Faithless*" (Kesey, *Great Notion* 18). The early Stampers are "stringy-muscled brood," and "With too much bone and not enough meat," they are not able to correct their "curse" until they acquire more "practical" pursuits like setting up businesses and taking

[27] Kesey himself seems to share some of the footloose wanderers of his fiction. He abandoned writing fiction after *Great Notion*'s publication and lukewarm reception, and the fact has become endless fodder for critics more fascinated with his life story than his fiction. Kesey wanted to *live* his novels rather than write them was the explanation for the abandonment of his vocation.[27] Kesey's reliance on experience over mere intellectualism or artistic production is famously outlined in Tom Wolfe's *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, published in 1968. Wolfe's portrayal of Kesey oscillates between the masterful, intellectual, creative, and often domineering leader of a cultural, youthful revolution and "a glorified beatnik up on two dope charges, and why make a hero out of him" (6). Interestingly, Wolfe describes Perry Lane, Kesey's home in California as "Walden Pond, only without any Thoreau misanthropes around. Instead, a community of intelligent, very open, out-front people—out front was a term everybody was using—out-front people who cared deeply for one another, and *shared*…in incredible ways, even, and were embarked on some kind of…*well*, adventure in living" (47). Perry Lane was, like Walden Pond, an experiment in organicism and outdoor living, an engagement with the nature world. But at the same time Kesey was interested, like others in the counter culture, in the human impact upon the environment, he was completely engrossed in the technology becoming available in the late-1960s. Writing about the counterculture movement of the 1960s, Bill Osgerby explains, "In this way the iconography of radical youth served as an emblem of nonconforming individualism, an affirmation of a masculine identity that eschewed stodgy conservatism in favour of fashionable leisure, stylistic display, and the pleasures of commodity consumption" (Osgerby 185). To say that those who participated in the counterculture, hippies and indeed Kesey himself, were entirely aware of and concerned with their ecological impact would be slightly overstating the fact. There is no way to ignore Kesey's love of and fascination with vehicles—his bus and his motorcycles—or his use of various media—devices for recording the goings on—on his trip with the Merry Pranksters. "Sandy could see that Kesey wasn't primarily an outdoorsman," Wolfe observes, "He wasn't that crazy about unspoilt Nature. It was more like he had a vision of the forest as a fantastic stage setting…in which every day would be a happening, an art form…" (51). Indeed, Kesey is most interested in human's relationship to and manipulation of the natural world, choosing the wilds of the Oregon forest for the staging of the homosocial rivalry and desire between two brothers.

part in already established communities (18, 20-1). In removing any high-minded purpose or even pragmatic significance from the Stampers' movement, they remain in "a kind of trancelike dedication" to "leapfrogging west across wild young America," "not as pioneers doing the Lord's work in a heathen land, not as visionaries blazing trail for a growing nation […] but simply as a clan of skinny men inclined always toward itchy feet and idiocy, toward foolish roaming, toward believing in greener grass over the hill and straighter hemlocks down the trail" (18-9). Like every other pioneer and migrant who went before them, the Stampers seek the monolithic American wild that never quite existed. Indeed, the citizens of Wakonda and the strikers, like Chief Bromden in *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, feel a general distrust of the mechanization invading their labor forces: "The trouble ain't administration, it's automation. Homelite saws, one-man yarders, mobile donkey—why *half* the men can cut *twice* the trees" (51). Interestingly, it is not for reasons of conservation that these men fear the introduction of the machine into the garden, to invoke Leo Marx. Despite desiring growth and progressiveness, the men display a distrust of the technological advancement that allows a faster destruction of natural spaces. Although it is not for the natural spaces they are concerned, their distrust of machines and a decrease in required labor signals the anxiety about the forces of the postwar discontent.

The critique of the Western frontier mythology is just one way Kesey subverts popularized ideas held during the Cold War. Through the critique of human domination of the natural world and the establishment and priority of the homosocial relationships, Kesey also dismantles the idea that masculinity is reliant upon two predetermined notions: "real" men are perceptibly heterosexual and their only relationship to

environment around them comes in the form of domination and violence. Hank is exemplar of this critique both as a "sensitive" when it comes to the landscape and animals and as the main purveyor of homosociality in the novel. Besides this, *Great Notion* also engages with issues of Women's Liberation by giving Viv a chance for escape and transformation in the end of the novel. While the men are running off together to again engage with the work of the forest and each other and to enact their own brand of hypervirility (whether it fails or not), Viv rejects heteronormativity and the domestic space associated with her marriage to Hank. The apparent influence of the Women's Lib movement on Kesey certainly goes a long way in breaking down the ultra-masculine ethic with which others identify and define Kesey and his work. Further in the Krassner interview, Kesey reveals, "Women's lib has made us aware of the debauching of Mother Earth. The man who can peel off the Kentucky topsoil, gouge the land empty to get his money nuts off, then splits the conquest, leaving the ravaged land behind to raise his bastards on welfare is different from Hugh Hefner only in that he drives his cock on diesel fuel" (219).[28] Kesey speaks like an ecofeminist here, pointing out the connection between the subjugation and debauchery of women as well as nature. Kesey's evocation of rape and unsanctioned procreation indicates his awareness of not just the environmental impact of violence and overuse of the land and resources (which is here gendered male) but also of the Cold War ideological shift in relation to the natural world and the state of reproduction. His insistence that "Women's lib is the real issue in *Notion*" is also his acknowledgement of the queering of masculinity, its relationship to

[28] Perhaps some would point out that Kesey's misogyny is quite apparent in this response. That is, Man is acting violently upon Nature, which is gendered Woman. But I read the response more openly. It is, in contradiction to the misogyny with which people label Kesey, a response that exposes the possibilities of an openly different gender politics for Kesey's work.

the other-than-human world and the work community, and shifting of the sexual continuum that occurs.

CHAPTER III

"A VOLUNTARY EXILE, A PERMANENT RESIDENT": NATURALIZING LESBIANISM AND STERILITY IN JANE RULE'S *DESERT OF THE HEART*

> And although it has been accepted in recent years that there is no such thing as nature, that everything is culture, there remains within that culture a core of nature which resists examination, a relationship excluded from the social in the analysis—a relationship whose characteristic is eluctability in culture, as well as in nature, and which is the heterosexual relationship. —Monique Wittig, "The Straight Mind"
>
> Nevada is beautiful in her wildness, and if tillers can thus be brought to see that possibly nature may have other uses even for rich soil besides the feeding of human beings, then will these foodless deserts have taught a fine lesson. —John Muir, "Nevada Farms"

About six years after Kate Millet declared in *Sexual Politics*, her influential feminist literary study, that "[F]emale homosexuality is currently so dead an issue that while male homosexuality gains a grudging tolerance, in women the event is observed in scorn or in silence," Jane Rule published *Lesbian Images* (337). Generally, *Lesbian Images* is Rule's analysis of the lesbian authors who came before her. Each chapter objectively outlines the work of individual lesbian authors, from Radclyffe Hall to Jill Johnston, who examine the subject of the love between women. In *Lesbian Images*, Rule proves that not only is lesbianism *not* a dead issue but also that, at least in her personal case, the subject of heterosexual marriage is decidedly unsettled. In the introduction to

Lesbian Images, Rule references her parents' marriage, proclaiming, "Rarely two people share an avocation for family life and bring it to all the intense imagination usually associated instead with careers, religious service, or the arts" (7). With her parents' nearly ideal marriage in mind, she nevertheless acknowledges that being a wife is a performance that takes practice. To this, Rule admits that she does not "have the native talent" required for heterosexual marriage.[1] It is important to note Rule's admission that heterosexual marriage contains an intersection between two competing yet complicit elements: the one a performance, a learned and rehearsed role requiring labor akin to a career and based upon some kind of cultural decree; and the other, a kind of inborn and spontaneous ability that one is either born with or without. Taken together, these two elements indicate the continuing tension between what is considered natural and unnatural, innate and acquired, bringing to the fore Rule's contention that heterosexual marriage walks a fine line between the two.

Similarly, Rule begins her 1964 novel *Desert of the Heart* with a discussion of the "convention" of marriage that makes it "the idiom of life" for women (7). These idioms and language largely, disguised as a "natural" component of life by their unexamined acceptance and justification, Rule makes moot when a woman "is forced to admit that she has never been able to pronounce it properly" (7). Such a woman, when marriage is "a foreign tongue," becomes a "voluntary exile" in "an alien landscape" because she cannot (and *not* will not) accept marriage as the "natural" objective in a woman's life. Evelyn Hall, an English professor from Berkeley, California, is the particular woman of which Rule is writing. As the novel begins, Evelyn is traveling to the desert of Reno, Nevada

[1] Although, her nearly 50-year partnership with Helen Sonthoff (which only ended at Sonthoff's death) is notwithstanding, of course.

(known for its "quickie" divorces) to seek a divorce from her husband, George. There, she meets Ann Childs, a sometime cartoonist and change apron at a local casino, and they fall in love. Consequently, from the beginning of the novel, Rule establishes marriage as a terrain strange and unnatural for *some* women, particularly Evelyn and Ann, and replaces it with a lesbian experience that is made conspicuous by its relationship to the natural world and its refusal to be marked by any naturalized convention. As one critic aptly points out, Rule's refusal to accept marriage wholeheartedly goes far in defining "marriage as a convention [that] draws attention to both the social plots that constrain women and the patterns of spiritual narrative that help figure the novel as a literary form: conventionally speaking, both the novel's and the women's stories are predicated upon and resolved through marriage" (Breen 199). By beginning her novel with a direct questioning of the accepted convention of marriage, Rule is immediately aligning herself on the side of revising these conventions.

But Rule's particular questioning of convention also goes a long way in challenging notions of the natural. In fact, as Stacy Alaimo aptly points out, the act of naturalization "is a mode of cultural work" so that resistance to the heterosexism of the "natural" can occur "only through discursive subversion, deconstruction, and rearticulation" (170). Rule actively takes natural spaces, usually marked and owned by heterosexism and normativity, and remakes them into spaces sanctioned for the consummation of lesbian relationships: "The fact that nature is experienced via the body of Ann, the face of Evelyn, and Evelyn's 'being with Ann' suggests instead that their desire actually drives the embrace of the desert as a 'natural' but queer place" (Alaimo 169). Alaimo's larger argument is not that Rule endows her queer, female characters

with some kind of special attachment to the natural world but rather that Rule's characters actively and purposefully complicate "the natural to such a degree that it can no longer serve as the bedrock of heterosexuality" (166). The extension of notions of normalness or even naturalness into the realm of lesbianism relegates queerness to a more open sphere of experience in Rule's novel, one that expands definitions of both acceptable and conventional sexuality, as well as expanding the implications of human engagement with the environment.

I would argue that Rule revises familiar narratives to allow for the naturalization of lesbianism as a means of extending queerness into the realm of the natural rather than merely foreclosing the affirmative possibilities of all expressions of desire; that is, Rule emphasizes the recognition of love between women as a viable means of sexual and emotional expression. My own reading coincides with Marilyn Schuster's argument that "when women write about loving women there is no more than a mere substitution or shift in themes, there is a fundamental thematic transformation realized through the conjunction of narrative voice and narrative object" (432). The politics of survival for Schuster "no longer means only the insertion of a lone, tortured, or exotic lesbian figure into a hostile social and textual environment, but the creation of new ways of speaking and seeing so that lesbian reality can find a viable means of expression" (431). Schuster highlights Rule's pragmatic use of heteronormative ideology since "[s]he does not blindly promote the norms generated by that cultural matrix, nor is she complacent about the privileges and deprivation that those norms protest and impose" (433). I would add to Schuster's evaluation that Rule upsets the natural/unnatural binary by not only naturalizing the lesbian figure and giving her expression through new means (those

means being an uncompromised and unfetishized shared narration of Ann and Evelyn) but also revising such concepts as femininity and motherhood, taking into account the meaningfulness of alternative temporalities.

The disruption of accepted conventions and narratives is the main purpose behind *Desert*, and Rule gives her characters, all of them queered in some way, the ability to remake conventions and spaces to suit a queer plotting. The desert (and at times the alkali lake which lies on the outskirts of Reno) functions in three vital ways: as the physical space, apart from the prying eyes and restrictions of convention, for Ann and Evelyn's relationship to thrive and become consummated (much like the forest functions for the Stampers in *Sometimes a Great Notion*); as the space where the semantic and symbolic work of terms such as natural and production, as well as fertility and sterility, is disrupted; and, in general, as the place where, because it houses the casino, people come to cross the lines of conventionality and respectability. Many of the revisions of conventions, then, are found in semantic shifts. Toward the end of the novel, Evelyn tells Ann, "Nothing else I've ever known has been as right and as natural as loving you" (216). The confession is a direct reversal of Evelyn's earlier admission: "I know I talk in clichés. I can't help it. I feel we're wrong, Ann. It isn't right. It isn't natural. I can't go on with it. I don't want to" (216). Evelyn demonstrates her understanding of two things in these declarations: one is her ability to speak in convention and cliché, labeling her lesbian relationship as "unnatural" and highlighting her reluctance to break with convention by divorcing George; the other is her ability to reverse those conventions, to rename the "natural" to include her discoveries.

These linguistic borders, though, always bear a relationship to the human

constructions of language and the meanings of the natural whether connected to sexualities or the physical, other-than-human world. Rule, according to Bonnie Zimmerman, challenges the idea of the "unnaturalness" of lesbianism by representing the natural world as "not always fecund and blooming," but rather as the desert. The desert *appears* to be "sterile and empty" but is actually "bursting with life" (43).[2] The desert might actually be "antinatural," as Zimmerman calls it, because "it disrupts the biological 'imperative' linking sex and reproduction" (43).[3] But the desert, like the casino in which Ann works, is a site of "free will and choice," giving each site its own affirmative perspective (43). In fact, as Donald Worster argues in *Under Western Skies*, the lands of the Western United States provided an idealized type of freedom for its settlers: "For many, the bondage has been the expectations of others, their importunings and demands, their dependency, their entrapments, emotional and economic. Men have gone west to get away from women, women to get away from men" (84).[4] Further, Worster extends this idealization of the freedom of the West into its physical characteristics:

> We have found a vast space in which to be natural again, to be unencumbered except by the encumbrances we freely choose and then only as long as we choose

[2] Jon Christensen debates the semantic difference between "wilderness" and "wasteland" in association with the Nevada desert and the paradox of its characteristics: "And so we begin to get a hint of the redemption possible in wilderness and even in the wasteland, as they blend together and become metaphors for life itself—not just life in its beneficent, embracing, nurturing sense, but life as difficult, harsh, challenging, necessarily risky, and yes, even dangerous. And that, I think, gets pretty close to life in the wilds of Nevada" (65).

[3] It is troubling, though, when Zimmerman suggests that Rule's novel is symptomatic of a larger turn in lesbian theory that states that lesbianism is somewhere outside the "realm of nature" because it "represents the most fully human existence" (43). While it is not Zimmerman's fault that this idea exists, the argument highlights the deceptive binary of nature/culture (nature equaling anything non-human and culture corresponding with all that is human) and ignores the affirmative ways in which lesbians and queers utilize and adapt "natural spaces" for their own purposes.

[4] The Western Paradox, as spelled out by Worster in the classic *Under Western Skies*, is basically the machine in the garden image: "Two dreams then are tugging at our feelings: one of a life in nature, the other with machines; one of a life in the past, the other in the future. Nature makes us what we are, we still like to think, makes us good and decent; but it is technology that makes us better" (81).

> them. But here is the rub: If this vision of liberation is to endure, this western space must *stay open*, which is to say, it must *stay dry*. Freedom in our western vision requires aridity. It depends on the brilliance of light, an openness of terrain, a clean spaciousness that gives us plenty of room to spread out and look around, to get some distance from the crowd, to deal with our private selves, to renew hope. It requires the West as it naturally was and is. A little more water might spoil it all. (85)

The West's aura of openness is positioned squarely in the American imagination. Tellingly, Evelyn's first glimpse of the desert gives her a feeling of familiarity, but "not because she had ever been there before. She had seen the travel posters and the advertisements. She had reluctantly read westerns" (*Desert* 8). But the desert's mystique and allure should not be discounted. Interestingly, Worster connects the desert's appeal (its openness) with the very thing many find uninviting (its dryness). Worster's utopian vision of the deserts of West imagines freedom as "vast space," both physical and psychic, I would suggest, in which to act and live as one may wish. The interplay between the desert's natural condition—its aridity—and its construction via human need and interpretation highlights an essential element of Rule's queer version of the desert. The openness of the desert is not just ideal for the clandestine encounters in which Ann and Evelyn engage; it also allows them to act upon their own performances and interpretations.

Queerness and natural spaces that are opened up to queer possibilities are suggestive of self-determination and liberation in the novel, while heterosexual relationships and those traditionally reinforced by institutions are often either portrayed

as ambivalently death-dealing or ignorant of free will. For Rule, queer relationships, and lesbian ones specifically, are about the opening of choice and the shedding of restriction. Elizabeth Grosz believes it best to avoid the "polarized model" of lesbian relations that often figure them in terms of, amongst other things, "narcissistic doubles, self-reflections, bound to each other through mutual identification and self-recognition, or in terms of complementarity" ("Refiguring Lesbian Desire"181). These binaries, like most other binaries, are limiting, so instead Grosz introduces a kind of lesbian desire that, like queer ecology itself, is constantly productive, since "desire does not provide blueprints, models, ideals, or goals. Rather, it experiments; it makes; it is fundamentally aleatory, inventive" (180). She evokes the Deleuzian notion of "becoming" to characterize queer desire as "not a question of being (-animal, -woman, -lesbian), of attaining a definite status as a thing, a permanent fixture" (184). In fact, to be sexually productive rather than sexually reproductive is to see "this pleasure can serve no other purpose, have no other function, than its own augmentation and proliferation" (183). In a model that differs from Isherwood's wholesale dismissal of and desire to commit violence to reproductive heterosexuals, Rule does not comprehensively demonize heterosexuality or those who embrace reproduction and marriage by conventional means. Reproductive couples do not bear the responsibility of apocalypse here; rather, they are to be pitied in some instances because they are merely following convention. Rule extends the narrative of naturalness to indicate the primacy of lesbian relationships and the inadequacy of both marriage and heterosexual procreation for *some* people, particularly Evelyn.

By way of illustrating her unwillingness to fully reject or embrace either the homosexual and heterosexual lifestyle, Rule complicates dominant narratives that link

childbearing with heterosexism. "I think one of the most offensive things in my work," explains Rule in a 1976 interview, "for people who are defensive about [homosexuality] is that the people I write about who are homosexual, are not ghettoized, are not excluded, are not strange, peculiar, sick people. That's very scary" (Hancock 90).[5] Rule's effort to normalize the experiences of lesbians in the face of a society unready to admit that homosexuality is neither pathology nor blight is especially noteworthy. Another critic points out that "Rule's commitment to presenting non-sensationalised homosexual and lesbian characters brought her similar problems with critics who appears to resist the ordinariness of her fictional worlds, apparently preferring to see deviancy either demonised or idealised, if they had to see it at all" (Sheridan 18-9). Gillian Spraggs calls the novel "a book that challenged a wilderness of silence and malice" (117). Further in the 1976 interview, Rule herself outlines her motivation behind writing *Desert*:

> I wanted to write a book that dealt with what the world said was pointless, purposeless, sterile. I wanted to write about how people worked, how people loved, how people dealt with the land. And take those values that we get in western culture. The claim, or the justification is, what you do is productive. You marry and have children. You make a product that is important and you transform the land into land that works for you. You grow your crops and you produce a living. […] I wanted to write a book about activities, ways of life, that had no justification inside our value system. (Hancock 95)

The "justification" for marrying and bearing children is reflective of Isherwood's

[5] Of her novels, Rule further states: "None of these people are carrying out a silverware ad notion of what it is for one person to relate to another. I suppose the difficulty in understanding my fiction is, if you come to it with a number of clichés about how people relate to each other, you will be in a world that doesn't make any kind of sense at all. You will say over and over, 'People don't do that, people don't feel that…'" (90). According to Rule's own viewpoint, the unconventionality and unpredictability of characters are key to the disruption of the normative behaviors accepted by the reading public.

restrictive model of heteronormativity, and the invocation of transforming land speaks to Kesey's ideas about human manipulation of the environment. But the way Rule represents it, the heterosexual way of life links marriage and childbearing with the working the land into something productive, or, I would add, reproductive. According to the narrative Rule lays out, the only ways to justify life are to manipulate the land and produce children to carry on that husbandry. But it is not her purpose to supplant heterosexism with an idealized form of lesbianism that is "sterile" or non-productive. Rather, lesbianism is a representative of alternative and creative possibilities for leading a productive life.

In adopting the "barren" and "sterile" Reno desert as the site for their liaisons, Ann and Evelyn shift acknowledged notions of the natural world, expanding the definitions of social norms as well as adequate and socially agreeable environments. Alicia Barber, in her history of Reno, claims, "Reno possesses more sex appeal than any town between New York and Hollywood" (qtd. in Barber, 136). Because of the divorce industry (called the "divorce mill" because of its mechanical process and rapidity),[6] Reno was home to a mishmash of populations: divorcees from all walks of life (including the Hollywood stars of the times), cowboys and ranch hands, ranch owners, witnesses, judges and attorneys. Barber notes that popular press saw Reno in terms of "scandalous fun," and as a "a playground for adult amusement" as well as housing "the possibility of experiencing a romantic interlude around every corner" (136). These things seemingly

[6] The Reno divorce industry is also known as "the 'quickie' divorce business" (Barber 54). Divorce seekers need only establish a short, six-week residency in order to procure a divorce in the state of Nevada. Besides this, the allowable grounds for divorce were lightened, and it became easier to divorce without excessive evidence or reason. The loosening of the restrictions, particularly those sponsored and reinforced by the state, associated with the institution of marriage is evident and important here. Longevity and reproduction are no longer key in the divorce situation; dissolution and distance is.

lowered the strict moral standards to which the rest of the country was held. It is not overstating the fact, I think, that Reno is the unstructured and loose place that Barber describes. A city that thrives because of its sex (brothels have flourished in the state throughout the twentieth century) as well as its casino and divorce industries is a city that owes its success to forms of behavior outside the proscriptive norms of American mainstream society. That is not to say that lesbianism is a "vice" as gambling and prostitution are often considered "vices." Rather, consider the openness with which Reno allows for "other" behaviors.

As far as natural environments go, the deserts of the American West, including Nevada, provide a space for the extension and rearticulation of conventions. As an ecosystem, the desert contains a unique and varied set of characterizations, ones different from those with which Kesey (the forests and rivers of the Pacific Northwest) and Isherwood (the valleys of Southern California) engage. In 1968's *Desert Solitaire*, Edward Abbey states that the Utah desert "is different":

> Not so hostile as the snowy peaks, nor so broad and bland as the ocean's surface, it lies open—given adequate preparation—to leisurely exploration, to extended periods of habitation. Yet it can hardly be called a humane environment; what little human life there is will be clustered and out in the oases, natural or man-made. The desert waits outside, desolate and still and strange, unfamiliar and often grotesque in its forms and colors, inhabited by rare, furtive creatures of incredible hardness, and cunning, sparingly colonized by weird mutants from the plant kingdom, most of them as spiny, thorny, stunted, and twisted as they are tenacious. (241-2)

Perhaps when one imagines nature, one does not immediately think "desert."[7] On the other hand, it is easy to say "forest" or "valley" and instantaneously link it with "nature." Conceivably, as Abbey's explanation seems to indicate, this is because desert lands are not obviously suited to human habitation and contain within their ecosystems "weird mutants" and "rare, furtive creatures" not often seen in other environments. The mutant and furtive creature are exceedingly apt metaphors for the divorcee or lesbian in the desert of Reno. The openness of desert and the perceived hostility to other typical forms of human life seem perfectly suited to the supposed abnormality of a woman seeking the dissolution of her marriage and/or the companionship of another woman. Isolated and somehow empty (though not in any unconstructive sense), the desert aids Ann and Evelyn in their affair by broadening and releasing physical and linguistic borders.

But a purely anthropocentric model of the desert as useful to humans does not neatly fit in Rule's novel either. In a 1985 essay entitled "The Harvest, The Kill," Rule cautions that humans' "basic trouble" is "[O]ur denial that we are part of nature, our sense of superiority to it" (242).[8] Always conventionally characterized as "barren" or "infertile," the desert functions in the novel as a (re)productive space. The desert's infertility, however, is neither death-dealing, symbolic of non-reproductively nor even suggestive of negativity. The desert is not barren in the traditional sense of being lifeless

[7] In an article about the postructuralist difficulty of interpreting traditional nature writing, Claire Lawrence cautions against the assumption of naturalness, particularly in Edward Abbey's postmodern representations of the Utah desert: "The designation of the natural and the reading of the natural is always cultural. When one enters an environment, one sees it through the filters of cultural knowledge and language. *Desert Solitaire* has a lesson: if we unquestioningly adhere to the realistic conventions of traditional nature writing, we run a risk of reproducing oppressive power structures" (165). It is a lesson that can be applied, I think, to *Desert of the Heart* as well.

[8] "We are related to what we harvest and kill," Rule further argues, since "I am flesh, a flesh eater, whether the food is carrot or cow. Harvesting and killing are the same activity, the interrupting of one life cycle for the sake of another. We don't stop at eating either. We kill to keep warm. We kill for shelter" (242). Rule suggests here that we are all indicted within a cycle of production and consumption and that no one—no human or animal—is separate from this cycle.

and unproductive.[9] I would argue that Rule's desert is barren in the sense that is it open to interpretation and that such an interpretation is boundary-less. During their desert lovemaking session, Ann's "free, inventive wildness" allows Evelyn to transcend her humanness and provoke "every vague, animal desire in Evelyn that had been left unnamed" (171). It is also freedom, "the freedom [Evelyn] wanted, an animal freedom exposed to the emptiness of the sky and land and water" (171). Ann's inventiveness is productive, not reproductive, and affirmative because it offers Evelyn a new way of looking at things (specifically, the desert and her relationship to it) as well as the open-ended, becoming-ness characterized by Elisabeth Grosz in "Refiguring Lesbian Desire."

In fact, the desert's lack of water is symbolic of the "simple fact" of ecology at large: human's potential for explanation of natural landscape can be without permanent and rigid definition. The barren desert, left alone by those who refuse to or cannot see its productivity, is not crowded with the expectation and definition usually ascribed to other wild spaces. I quote two passages at length here to illustrate the importance of interpretation of natural landscape to Rule's characters. Through their semantic play and debate, Ann's feelings about the desert become evident. The passage comes from an exchange with Evelyn during their first trip into the desert:

> "[…] There was never water here, not fresh water."
>
> "But you love the whole damned world," Evelyn said, "or so you claimed last night."
>
> Ann smiled. "Yes, I do. The desert seems to me the simple truth about the

[9] Or as Margaret Soenser Breen explains in her article on the biblical symbols in the novel, "The desert is a landscape of self-address; it is the objective correlative of Ann and Evelyn's love story, the inverted narrative that remains for exiles from convention" and "Where fertility demands appropriation, Evelyn and Ann's landscape remains a sterile inviolable one, a wilderness that resists cultivation, that is itself self-sustaining" (202, 201).

world."

"What simple truth?"

"The earth's given out. Men can't get a living from it. They have to get it from each other. We can't have what we need, but we can take what we want. It's true everywhere. Here it's easy to see."

"I don't agree," Evelyn said. "Everywhere is not a desert."

"But the desert's beautiful," Ann said. "Look." (105)

The simple command to "look" at the desert illustrates the simplicity of taking this semantic step. Nature can no longer supply what man needs so the turn to human-to-human contact for those necessities is essential. Here, Ann reveals she takes what she wants from Evelyn because an erotic relationship with the environment is seemingly impossible. As Gillian Spraggs explains, the idea that Evelyn's desire for Ann comes "from a nature that is implicitly, but not quite expressly, constructed as flawed […] is a small step in language to constructing her desire as 'natural'—but a very large sideways step in semantics" (127). After the two consummate their relationship sexually, "the language of 'nature' becomes pervasive, a vocabulary that seeps into Ann's discourse, too: 'wild, natural, insistent poetry', 'an animal freedom', 'an animal desire', 'like the cry of some mythical water bird'" (Spraggs 127). Ann's animality is tied into not just her relationship with her surrounding—it is tied in Evelyn as well. Even if the earth is somehow used up, Ann can still find erotic productiveness in her relationship with Evelyn. In fact, Ann later admits to Evelyn, "It's fertility that's a dirty word to me," continuing:

I'm terrified of giving in, of justifying my own existence by means of simple

> reproduction. So many people do or try to. And there are the children, so unfulfilling after all. And they grow up to do nothing but reproduce children who will reproduce, everyone so busy reproducing that there's no time to produce anything. But it's such a temptation. It seems too natural—another dirty word for me. What's the point? […] We'll multiply in spite of ourselves always. We'll populate the desert. One day there will be little house and docks all along this shore, signs of our salvation. (109)

Combined, these two passages spoken by Ann reveal what is at stake for Rule's lesbian characters: an appropriation of traditional notions of reproduction, fertility, and perpetuity. Ann's "dirty words" are "fertility" and "natural" because they are evidence of a mindless, widely unquestioned, and implicitly heterosexist agenda. Related, the desert's lack of fresh water is actually a sign of ecological destruction. She reveals her bias here, and it is not necessary a wholesale opposition to reproduction. Rather, she reveals herself against a kind of mechanical reproduction that seems to be a trap into which people fall if their lives go unexamined.

But it is not useful to imagine the desert entirely in terms of human exploitation. It, like all other natural environments, is not merely waiting for humans to come and legitimate it. Rather, as Rule points out, the desert is already queer. How Rule uses these spaces for her queer characters is essential to the queer resistance of narratives of heteronormativity. The desert, then, functions for Evelyn not just as a site of freedom but also as the place in which she is both "a voluntary exile" from the geography of convention and "a permanent resident" of her own making in a newly defined landscape (115). Borrowing Marilyn Farwell's claim that woman-centered narrative moments

allow the space for changeable definitive boundaries, I would argue that the desert is not a space of rigid, misplaced signifiers.[10] It shifts meaning throughout the novel, becoming adapted to both Ann and Evelyn's changing desires. At first, Evelyn is uncomfortable in the desert, distrustful of its vastness and isolation because she is initially imbued with the larger meaning of the desert: "She wanted Ann to turn the car around and drive back to Reno, which, alien and hostile, was at least human. There was no way Evelyn could comprehend this unnatural, dead body of water, still, killing, blue" (106). The use of the word "unnatural" does indeed coincide with notions of the sterility of the desert. It also means for Evelyn the removal of the human element. "But there's nothing here," Evelyn complains to Ann, meaning no human development and no recognized signs of nature, i.e. trees. Her frame of reference and ability to interpret are limited. Before she comprehends Ann's relation to her, the desert is symbolic of dryness, sterility, and dangerous loneliness. And, besides this, the desert is also, at least in the beginning, the space she associates with the dissolution of her marriage.

Later, Evelyn comes to link the desert and the alkali lake with her sexual encounters with Ann, making the spaces an important site of the naturalization of queerness. Even though the desert frightens and confuses her at first, she later forgets these feelings in favor of her desire to be alone and isolated with Ann. The remoteness and openness of this particular oasis are the very reasons Ann chooses to bring Evelyn there. "I like miles to myself," Ann confesses, making it apparent from the very beginning this oasis is to her the perfect location for the privacy she needs in which to

[10] In her essay on homoerotic desire between women in heroic narratives, Marilyn Farwell labels a "space of sameness" which allows for the appearance of lesbian desire in seemingly dichotomous stories (97). "Such a concentration of one woman on another disturbs if not destroys Western dualisms," explains Farwell, resulting in "a space defined by fluid instead of rigid boundaries" (97).

cull her relationship to the other woman (107). This causes Evelyn in turn to associate the once-sterile desert with the security and openness of her lesbian relationship: "In that great openness of water, desert, and sky, it was curiously private; but the security it provided was, for Evelyn, a frail illusion. She was, nevertheless, grateful for it" (107). After Evelyn initially rejects the possibility of a sexual encounter with Ann at this particular moment and this particular oasis, she finds her notions of sexuality and landscape simultaneously disrupted (and perhaps awakened). I quote the passage at length here in order to emphasize the complexities of Evelyn's response to these disruptions:

> She watched Ann wade out for the bottle of wine, that young, beautiful body she had so carefully admired an hour ago to take her mind off the terrors of the landscape. Its sudden erotic power bewildered and offended her, whose taste and decorum usually governed her private thoughts as firmly as they governed her public living. Evelyn blushed with impatience and embarrassment. Physical response was no more significant than a hiccup, a sneeze, a twinge of gas, functional disorders which caused discomfort but not alarm. If she were to mistrust her own psychic health and morality every time she crossed her legs during the ballet or a reading of a French novel, she would keep her psychiatrist and a minister as busy as a hypochondriac keeps a doctor. It was not important. To exaggerate a single kiss into significant guilt was a real loss of aesthetic distance. (111-12)

The eschewal of Ann's body and the "terrors of the landscape" are not incidental.[11] Even

[11] Later in the novel, Ann realizes she "could not leave the desert. In her human loneliness, the landscape had become her home. And she found it hard to imagine leaving the Club. Already she felt herself

in this early moment of Evelyn's fear of both Ann's eroticism and the desert, it is evident that there is an explicit connection between the two. Despite Evelyn's initial discounting of her physical arousal at the sight of Ann's body and her attachment to convention, her desire to minimize her psychic and physical response is the first step to normalizing both lesbian attachment and the arid landscape in her imagination.

The casino is naturalized for Ann much in the same way the desert is—as a homeland for her, a place where, despite the definitions applied by other people, she is fully at home. But it is a home that queers and ultimately denies the existence of Nature:

> Why did she do it? At the center of this desert industry, symbol of it, she wanted to take her place, for there was no nature. The apes could not have survived. Only man could have invented a living independent of the earth, related to no physical need, yet satisfying to them all. Out of his own nonanimal nature, he had found a weakness, a faith by which he could survive. (96)

The absence of nature is, then, behind the impetus for the gambling industry. The casino is "man's answer to the poverty of the land" (184). Because this "poverty" exists, that is, this absence of viable farmland that would *produce* some kind of goods, they have eliminated even the need for land and have skipped right to the machines whose only function is to make money. To Ann's mind, humankind is so divorced of the natural processes and accepting of them mindlessly like they accept procreation without questioning, it is nonanimal. But that does not make the casino any less natural. Ann's acceptance of the casino's meaning claims it for her interpretation of nature. Here again,

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threatened with losing the visions she had there, which would mean losing the light she worked by" (150). In some ways this reverses the earlier admission that man has to seek out other human beings to fulfill what the earth cannot provide by attaching her being to the desert and the casino. However, she is acknowledging how naturalized the spaces are for her.

Ann reveals herself to be fully aware and in charge of the way the casino is perceived as opposed to the way she sees it herself. The casino is also a haven for people from the ordinariness of everyday life, indeed a similar mechanical-ness that Ann ascribes to reproduction. And in the casino:[12]

> …faces, unless she could look directly into them, were sinister and grotesque. Something in the peculiar, artificial light, in the coolness of the air conditioning, distorted the suntanned, summer sweating skin of perfectly ordinary people. They were perfectly ordinary people, Ann reminded herself again and again. […] Part of the excitement for the tourist was his feeling that he had crossed the moral boundary of society as he crossed the threshold of a gambling casino. (133)

The casino, then, represents an escape for "normal" people from "normal" society; or, the casino is a deviant entity. In contrast, the tourists would return home "to the good, green, well-watered plains of the Lord to tell what they had seen, the coarse women, the obsessed men, the deserted children, never guessing that these picturesque inhabitants were tourists like themselves. They were perfectly ordinary people" (135).[13]

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[12] These "perfectly ordinary people" wish, like those who seek the casino in Michael P. Branch's article on the Silver Legacy Resort in Reno, to be drawn into believing in the naturalization of the casino's environment. The meaning of the casino, then, is an important part of evaluating the role of environment in *Desert*. I include Branch's work here as a means of explaining the placement of ecological concerns in the context of an "artificial" environment. Finished in 1997, the Silver Legacy Resort Casino in Reno features a painted dome, an "'illusioneered' sky," that, according to Branch, adjusts notions of time and space in order to create a "hybrid cultural artifact" that has the "dual imperative of containment and transcendence" (277, 287). The casino effectively "secedes from nature to recreate nature in (and within) its own image" (287). The casino's dome, which simulates the movement of the sunlight, its air-conditioned, controlled environment, and its manipulation of the past (through the manipulation of the casino's 19th-century mining town theme) reveals, as Branch points out, the casino's ultimate objective: "to attract people inside, to dissuade them from leaving" (291). Branch explains that the particular method of manipulating nature, time and space reveals, "Americans are all too willing to 'buy' (in both sense of the word) artificial representations of the natural world" (294). What Branch proves is that there is there is a fine line between what's natural and artificial in various environments. The manipulation of natural processes for profit and enjoyment is not new. The Silver Legacy Resort is no less "natural" than the desert that surrounds them. What makes it so is human interpretation.

[13] Ann's darker take on the casino comes about because at this point in the novel, she realizes she is in love with Evelyn. The "ordinary people" are presumably heterosexuals, people with families and normal lives

But the relationship between Ann and Evelyn does not, in opposition to Lee Edelman's argument about queerness and the death drive in *No Future*, run counter to narratives of motherhood and reproduction. Rather, it queers these narratives by opening definitions of motherhood and childbearing and -rearing to include alternative forms of adoption and family-formation and by reclaiming a femininity that forecloses the notion of the passive vessel and opposes its definition in relationship to men. Evelyn, even in her realization of her burgeoning lesbian desires, does not cease wanting to become a mother and to realize her femininity. Ever focused on her career and disengaged from her marriage, Evelyn appears in some ways to be a "masculinized" woman, but her relationship with Ann actually reaffirms her longing to accept femininity and her own womanly body in a way she is unable to with her husband, George. Ann too, in some distant way, believes herself a mother to the foreign children she sponsors. Even Silver, Ann's one-time lover, is in the end pregnant by her new husband, but so much of her affair with Ann coincides with the pregnancy that one might somehow suspect Ann of impregnating Silver.

As a means of reinforcing alternative ways of being productive, like Isherwood's ending to *A Single Man*, *Desert* rejects "the paradigm of ending desire through death" by allowing the novel's lovers to live in the end and even become reflected in the plate glass of the courthouse in which Evelyn's divorce becomes final (Vice 124).[14] Rule upsets the

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on the "outside." This should not, however, be interpreted as Rule's allowance of the otherness of these spaces and thus her reinforcement of destructive heterosexist tropes. She actually gives the casino another meaning in the novel: otherness exemplified by the casino's allowance for new definitions, transgressions, and an escape from the "real" of suburbia. The capacity of certain environments, specifically the desert and the casino, to work together and remake available logic is important to Rule's reversal of heterosexist conventions and naturalization of other interpretations.

[14] The novel, which Vice is careful not to qualify as "utopian," does present "a textual version of a sameness in love which does not lead to the over-cancelling sameness, the dead-end, of marriage or incest" (125). The ending, then, "means life, and uncertainty," which points up Vice's argument that Ann and

life/death, natural/unnatural binaries so often promoted by heterosexism not just by actively revising the meaning of natural spaces and embracing the eroticism of those natural spaces (a concept expressed by Gaard as "erotophobia") but also creating queer family units that endure. Rule also endows certain heterosexual, reproductive characters with suicidal tendencies while giving her queer characters more life-affirming attributes. And Michelle K. Owen sees attempts at queer family formation as both "mundane and menacing" because queer family units have a dual purpose, as her article's subtitle suggests: queering the normal and normalizing the queer (91).[15] For Rule, resistance to heterosexism and narratives of fecundity is not just about consummating lesbian desire; it is as much about seeking alternatives to conventional behaviors. Rule's queer nature frees its purveyors to conduct themselves as they see fit. Those who queer nature or naturalize queerness experience, at least on some level, an opening up of possibilities. Institutions, clichés and conventions are extracted and challenged because they are, at their core, invested in subduing difference and removing free will.

In not just naturalizing the aridity and barrenness of the desert but also the artificiality of the casino, Rule refuses the simple equation between homosexuality and non-reproduction. Challenging the notion of the naturalness of a grouping of lesbians, Rule reflects the diversity of homosexual (and heterosexual experience), remaining not ambiguous but open to interpretation.[16] Consequently, in an essay entitled "The Question

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Evelyn's desire for each other is more life-giving than any relationship the "ends" in marriage (125).

[15] The principle the dual purpose of queering the normal and normalizing the queer, Owen explains, lies in the desire not "to simply deconstruct or valorize 'family,' thereby allowing the assimliationist/anti-assimiliationist binarism to remain intact" (97). Owen is specifically addressing families headed by same-sex couples in Canada.

[16] As Monique Wittig points out in "One is Not Born a Woman": "…by its very existence, lesbian society destroys the artificial (social) fact constituting women as a 'natural group.' A lesbian society pragmatically reveals that the division from men of which women have been the object is a political one and shows that we have been ideologically rebuilt into a 'natural group'" (9).

of Children," Rule argues, "It is fashionable in some circles to speak of children as the blight of the heterosexual world, burdening those with more enlightened sexuality with noise pollution, road hazards, and school taxes. One of the 'benefits' of a gay retirement home is that one wouldn't have to sit in a rocking chair next to someone with a wallet full of pictures of grandchildren" (*A Hot-Eyed Moderate* 93). Rule's argument is this: even homosexuals, who through their sex acts *cannot* biologically reproduce, are interested in having children. It is the homosexual act that does not result in procreation, *not* the homosexual him/herself. Engaging with the contemporary rhetoric of the population bomb, Rule cautions:

> Before we [homosexuals] settle for being the smug answer to the population explosion, let us acknowledge that we have parents among us, that many of us have a sensibility which makes us particularly good with children, being less apt to make rigid role requirements, more sensitive to their bewilderments and need for reassurance, able to establish relationships with them that don't have to be rebelled against because we know, at first hand, the value of accepting difference and are not allowed to forget it. (94-5)

Invoking Ehrlich's idea of the population bomb, Rule refuses the tendency to associate death with queerness's relationship to reproduction.[17] She instead opens up the

[17] Indeed, in an essay in *A Hot-Eyed Moderate*, Jane Rule aptly explains the troubling truth behind the rhetoric of the population problem: "We hear a great deal about the 'population explosion,' but little about the withholding of resources the waste and misuse of protein, the use of food as a tool of international pressure. 'Population control' is targeted at women from groups considered expendable or 'unfit' on the basis of income, class, and race" (267). In her 1970 novel *This is Not For You*, the main character, Kate, echoes Rule's ambivalence toward the narrative of population explosion: "The attitudes we were developing and the decisions we were making were based on an older morality for populating those coastal hills and inland valleys. Though the Jews had already been burned and the smog already sometimes smarted our eyes, we were still prepared to be the victims rather than the heroines of a population explosion so violent, its fallout of conformity so deadly that even the conservative Church would begin to question its doctrines of moral sickness and health."

possibilities of a compassionate queerness that includes acceptance of differences and fluidity of social roles. I include these two extended quotations in order to support my own assertions about Rule's motivations in writing and advocating for lesbianism and queerness in general: at the same time she articulates a position critical of a rhetoric that reinforces the links between heterosexism, production, reproduction, and manipulation of the land, she is also challenging the idea that homosexuals are beyond not just the desire to reproduce but also the inducement or ability.

But it is not just notions of natural spaces and structured environments that Rule reconfigures. She also takes prescribed ideas about femininity and lesbianism and reverses them in order to illustrate that the "natural" order of things is an arbitrary construct. Or, as Adrienne Rich succinctly states, "Lesbian Existence comprises both the breaking of a taboo and the rejection of a compulsory way of life" ("Compulsory Heterosexuality" 27). By way of historical contextualization, I include here a brief description of the lesbian via Frank Caprio's 1953 interpretation. Caprio describes female "sexual inversion" as a "problem" caused by women "becoming rapidly defeminized as a result of their overdesire for emancipation, and that this 'psychic masculinization' of modern women in causing them to become frigid" (189). Amongst the "symptoms" of lesbianism is a desire to wear tailored men's clothing and to smoke in excess. Further, Caprio describes lesbianism as "the fashionable vice of the modern age," and it is often brought about by an abundant interest in one's career, which causes "the neurotically masculine women" to have unhappy and sexless marriages (190-1).[18]

[18] Conversely, Caprio also maintains, "Defeminization doesn't always lead to sexual repression, as cited above. Neurotic masculinity in women may give rise to promiscuity (an unconscious repudiation of femininity—a desire to enjoy the same sexual freedom as the male sex)" (193). In some respects and despite its inaccuracies, this description could well illustrate Ann's behavior—her relationships with Bill,

Simone de Beauvoir in her 1963 essay "The Lesbian" includes the opinion that the lesbian chooses "hard liquor, smoke strong tobacco, use language and take violent exercise" because "in her eroticism she gets enough soft feminine sweetness" (231). There is also this assertion:

> The chief misunderstanding underlying this line of interpretation is that it is *natural* for the female human being to make herself a *feminine* woman: it is not enough to be a heterosexual, even a mother, to realize this ideal; the "true woman" is an artificial product that civilization makes, as formerly eunuchs were made. Her presumed "instincts" for coquetry, docility, are indoctrinated, as is phallic pride in man. (231)

It seems, then, that as much as de Beauvoir wishes to debunk any notion of a natural femininity, since femininity equals passivity and *making* oneself an object (which itself speaks to an ironic assertiveness), it is nonetheless as de Beauvoir points out (somewhat dubiously), "It is most important to emphasize the fact that refusal to make herself the object is not always what turns women to homosexuality; most Lesbians, on the contrary, seek to cultivate the treasures of their femininity" (239).[19] That is, women become "masculine" when they seek personal advancement and begin sporting the outward signs of masculine dress.

Seemingly adhering to these accepted interpretations of homosexuality, George tells Evelyn, "All intelligent women are latent homosexuals. I like you in trousers"

Silver, and Evelyn overlap.

[19] De Beauvoir later argues: "Between women love is contemplative; caresses are intended less to gain possession of the other than gradually to re-create the self through her; separateness is abolished; there is no struggle, no victory, no defeat; in exact reciprocity each is at once subject and object, sovereign and slave; duality becomes mutuality" (239-40). Her claim, and indeed the claims of others who are invested in infusing certain relationships with utopic characteristics, that same-sex intercourse achieves "exact reciprocity" has been discounted by various critics.

(114). The markers of conventional femininity do not work for her, as she refuses "one ill-fitting uniform after another of the world's conventions. […] She could not be a wife with a wardrobe for parades" (115). She prefers being called Dr. to Mrs. because "her marriage had been more difficult than her Ph.D. to achieve and maintain" (10). In fact, Evelyn credits her academic training with her lack of prudishness: "If she had never actually made love to another woman, she was intellectually emancipated in all perversion of the flesh, mind, and spirit" (111). "[B]y clinical definition," Rule explains, highlighting the dispassionate nature of Evelyn and George's marriage, "she and her husband were unquestionably female and male, fertile and potent" (70). They cannot make a child together, however, and as Rule repeatedly demonstrates, cold, hard definitions do not always produce the desired results. But she makes some effort to be a "real" woman: "[I]f she could not bear a child, there were a hundred other conventions through which she could prove she was a woman," and those include, in the most traditional sense, laundry, sewing, and other domestic tasks traditionally assigned to women (119). The tensions between the innate characteristics and learned roles of women are acute in Evelyn.

But Rule is careful to portray Evelyn's failed marriage and divorce as neither ideal nor even utopian mainly because Evelyn herself is never entirely convinced of either the desire to act upon her feelings for women or the impulse to dissolve her marriage to George. It might even be appropriate to say that Evelyn exists on a lesbian continuum, to invoke Rich ("Compulsory Heterosexuality" 29). To do so would be to place Evelyn on an always influx and sliding scale of sexual experience. And although the lesbian continuum might not account for heterosexual sex, it could answer for

Evelyn's reluctance to divorce: she does not *identify* as a lesbian so keeping her marriage intact could account for her reluctance to leave the label of *wife* and *heterosexual* and *potential mother* in order to claim *lesbian*. Jani Scandura argues, in her piece on the Depression-era Reno divorce industry and its narratives, "a Reno divorce can be considered a product—indeed *the* product—of a modernity that had been built to 'redo' and 'renew' the institution of marriage" (244). One of these ways is through the liminal and "unfinished" bodies of the divorcees-to-be as they awaited the finalization of their divorces in Reno: "They stand in the middle of a process of building an institution (divorce) that relies on a simultaneous unbuilding and rebuilding of institutions that already stand (marriage, citizenship, gendered roles of production, renovation, reproduction, and consumption)" (252).[20] Divorce, at least initially, is not the ideal answer to the dissolution of her marriage. Evelyn is careful about the semantics of her situation with George, signaling a deeper concern for the state of marriage *when it works for certain people*.[21]

In this way, Rule does not discount marriage indiscriminately or even demonize those who choose marriage. In fact, partly due to her status as divorcee and her unwillingness to indict George in any wrongdoing, Evelyn relays a personal guilt that she believes is seated in her "nature": "Surely she could not be judged for a nature her will had never consented to. She had been good" (115). The struggle is apparent. Her nature makes her an inadequate heterosexual and marriage partner and pushes her into Ann's

[20] Interestingly, Scandura also argues, "The threat of queer desire underwrites most Reno narratives" (258). That is, whether male or female, the Reno resident seeking the divorce is always a suspect of queerness.
[21] Or, as Gillian Spraggs puts it, "The marital relationship, the terrain prescribed for them by social convention and conventional morality, has proved to be a ground where neither of them can flourish. But divorce, however necessary, remains, as the book's first paragraph describes it, a 'voluntary exile,' a movement into unknown territory" (122).

arms, but it is the role of Evelyn's will that makes this struggle fraught. Evelyn's reluctance to label George at fault for the divorce signals her unwillingness to condemn marriage as a category:

> Adultery, cruelty, even desertion were diseases a marriage suffered and could survive. The only incurable cancer was the inability of two people to live together. And, as a charge, incompatibility, if it laid blame at all, required the guilt of both partners. But legally incompatibility did not exist. And divorce was not a private symbolic act. Like marriage, it was a social institution. Though she wanted to protest, Evelyn recognized the irrelevance of her morality. (47-8)

What is at fault in the divorce is not the institution of marriage itself but rather the character of George and Evelyn's experience. Marriage does not work for Evelyn and George together, but Rule does not suggest that marriage, altogether, is to be reviled. And while Evelyn stops struggling with what she calls the "will and nature," she abandons her will finally.

Evelyn, then, transforms social fiction into self-actualization so that through Evelyn's reclamation of womanhood and femininity Rule again naturalizes lesbianism.[22] That is to say, Evelyn, even in her rejection of heterosexuality and marriage to George, forgoes markers of masculinity to fully embrace her female body. Tellingly marked by her sexual relationship with Ann, the beginning of Evelyn's awareness of her femininity "was not a synthetic maternity as she had expected it to be" (*Desert* 161). Her femininity, as dictated by convention, is not ruled by passivity or maternal feeling; rather, it is manifest in the discovery of, "underneath the strict discipline she had imposed on her

[22] In discussing the sexual politics of Rule's work, Susan Sheridan reveals that Rule "has long been aware that femininity was a social fiction which gave the lie to the most important aspects of her own life" (15).

mind, an inventiveness" as well as the desire "to be charming, provocative, desirable" for and to Ann (161-2). Their lovemaking becomes "instinctive" for Evelyn, and she rediscovers she is "by nature, a woman. And what a lovely thing to be, a woman" (162). Reclaiming her womanliness is not in contradiction to her lesbianism; rather, making love to another woman is what ignites the femininity she lost in being married to George. Later, she tells Ann: "'I wanted children, I wanted to live in a house. I wanted to be a woman.' 'Is that being a woman?' 'I thought so,' Evelyn said, 'but I was a very conventional young woman, darling'" (163). While Evelyn recognizes the predictability of her earlier desires, she does not fully rescind them.

As an offshoot of prescribed conventions of femininity, Rule dismantles and rebuilds parenting and motherhood. Motherhood appears in divergent forms in *Desert*, taking on a flexibility that one might expect from Rule, and in its most ideal forms, it is manifested as *choice*, a conscious decision one makes rather than a logical conclusion at which one is forced to arrive. It is also detached, often physically or psychologically, without an enforcement that restricts personal freedom. Rule complicates familial relationships by rearranging families to suit her character's needs and by not passively aligning biological parentage with decency and righteousness. Rule's discussion of mothers in the novel parallels Rich's delineation between the two forms of motherhood:

> In trying to distinguish the two strands, motherhood as *experience*, one possible and profound experience for women, and motherhood as enforced identity and as political *institution*, I myself only slowly began to grasp the centrality of the institution, and how it connects with the dread of difference that infects all societies. Under that institution, all women are seen primarily as mothers; all

> mothers are expected to experience motherhood unambivalently and in accordance with patriarchal values; and the "nonmothering" woman is seen as deviant. ("Motherhood in Bondage" 196-7)

Rich's opposition between the experience and institution is useful to my discussion. What Rule illustrates over and over is that when motherhood is a choice and does not necessarily bear the markers of heterosexist or patriarchal cultures, it can be more life-affirming than motherhood that is institutionalized. The idea of motherhood as an "enforced identity" appears in another essay by Rich in which she explains: "Through motherhood, every woman has been defined from outside herself: mother, matriarch, matron, spinster, barren, old maid—listen to the history of emotional timbre that hangs about each of these words" ("Motherhood: The Contemporary Emergency" 261). The idea of the enforcement of motherhood is a precursor to Rich's "compulsory heterosexuality," and she invokes it to explain the unavoidable nature of childbearing for well-behaved women everywhere. Kate McCullough, in an analysis of Rich's *Of Woman Born*, aptly points out Rich's purpose is to critique the "naturalized image of the heterosexual mother isolated within a normalized nuclear family unit" (109).[23] In *Mommy Queerest*, Julie Thompson also indicates the "utter superficiality of normativity" as she evaluates the "[l]esbian performances of motherhood [which] never simply reproduce heterosexual or bisexual enactments" (10).[24] These critiques also help to

[23] McCullough's larger purpose is to examine alternative guides to pregnancy and motherhood in the context of Rich's critiques of patriarchy, heterosexuality, idealized motherhood and naturalization. Tellingly, her discussion includes analyses of Cherrie Moraga's *Waiting in the Wing: A Portrait of a Queer Motherhood* and Rachel Pepper's *The Ultimate Guide to Pregnancy for Lesbians*. McCullough illustrates how Rich, despite the still apparent primacy and reinforcement of idealized motherhood, paved the way for varying figurations of queer, lesbian, and feminist, woman-centered motherhood for some women.

[24] *Mommy Queerest* takes on what Thompson labels the oxymoronic term "lesbian motherhood." By examining journalistic pieces from straight, feminist and lesbian presses, Thompson reveals the various tensions in the discourse of lesbianism, family-building, gender expectations, and motherhood. She is

expand my idea that queer possibilities and their evasion and eschewal of enforced identities aid in the opening up of new definition of boundaries. Motherhood without children or childbirth, through adoption and sponsorship, motherhood through sexual congress, short-lived motherhood without the restrictions or entrapment of often death-dealing and limiting nuclear family arrangements—all are various mean through which Rule engages in similar critiques of the institutionalized motherhood.

But the suggestion that Evelyn is the mother of Ann has a more sinister appearance as well, especially when it is suggested that the two are somehow related, if not biologically, at least metaphorically. The relation creates ambivalence in both, which in turn points out larger questions about motherhood and futurity. Invocation of the mother-and-child relationship can subsume the openness of queer possibility. In other words, relational stability symbolized by the convention of motherhood suggests a queering of queerness that *reverses* the purpose of queerness—the ever-shifting and open possibilities—by replacing it with rigid stability and foreclosing the possibility of transgression.[25] This is where Ann and Evelyn's mixed emotions on motherhood figure in. They are concerned with the otherness of each other at the same time they see the other reflected in themselves. To be free, and indeed to be a "free-lance lover," is to also

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concerned with the rhetoric, in both lesbian and straight presses, that makes lesbian motherhood a contradiction and that naturalizes the heterosexual, procreative family: "While homosexuality is construed as a matter of recruitment, heterosexuality is represented as the timeless essence of natural sexuality, even as its is propagandized, inculcated, and enforced in various sectors of society such as religion, education, law and the media" (35). The only way to rescript lesbian motherhood is to confront the heterosexist account of both motherhood and lesbianism.

[25] Judith Roof's point that some lesbian novels "focus on the unfulfillability of desire—on the desire for desire" allows for the characters in these novels to, in psychoanalytic terms, "avoid a mirror-stage temporal paradox in favor of confounding post-mirror-stage history itself, by the denying the importance of origins, even as the protagonists return to them" (167). Roof mainly analyzes Rule's 1970 novel *This Is Not For You*, but I find her idea of the "paradox of history" useful when applied to *Desert of the Heart*. Basically, as the paradox is articulated, despite conventional histories' need for total knowledge, lesbian fiction disrupts the need for total knowledge by allowing desire to often go unfulfilled: "to desire is to desire not to have a desire fulfilled; it is the desire for an unfulfilled desire" (169).

be without origin. Ann's desire to shatter Evelyn and break her apart is both her acknowledgement that she is seeking an attachment, an origin, at the same time she is decentering the notion of motherhood.

The same invocation and acknowledgement of motherhood threatens the queer possibility of Ann and Evelyn's relationship. Evelyn imagines herself protecting Ann as a mother would. Upon first meeting Ann, Evelyn's feelings of childlessness begin to stir, but she recognizes it as narcissism: "And Evelyn had learned the even less flattering names applied to the love a childless woman might feel for anything: her dogs, her books, her students…yes, even her husband. She was not afraid of the names themselves, but she was afraid of the truth that might be in them" (19). These names are likely related to Rich's list of names for childless, unmarried women that I included above, and it is significant that Evelyn recognizes herself in these names. Ann, then, functions as Evelyn's allowance for feeling tenderness, not just toward another woman but also another woman who is almost young enough to be Evelyn's child.[26] Ann's own desire to remain the "free-lance lover, proud craftsman of passion, cartooning cavalier against the mystic rose and all colors blue" is at odds with her sudden attachment to Evelyn (126).

[26] For example, Rule includes a flashback in which she recounts Evelyn's experience during World War II. With her husband away, Evelyn becomes the friend and close confidante of her neighbor, Carol. Under the guise of doubt about the war, the two are "reluctant and superstitious about speaking about the future," but I would argue that the superstition is actually superseded by a refusal to confine the relationship to terms of futurity (116). Carol is the only other woman besides Ann with whom Evelyn has shared intimacy, but the intimacy takes on an interesting and very telling form. The night Carol learns of her husband's death, she comes to Evelyn as an infant, requiring rocking and nursing: "For this curled need in her arms could be the end of waiting, months and years wasted in longing until, at last, the desire for comfort and nourishment could be nothing more than a perversion of the flesh, a blind sucking" (117). Carol doubles as lover and surrogate child. What keeps these women away from an acknowledgement of this highly sexualized occurrence, particularly Carol, is their normalized attachments to their husbands and their desire for children. With Carol (and with George away), Evelyn has "no role to play. There was no marriage. Not now at this moment" (117). Relying upon the present moment, Evelyn is simultaneously freed from her marriage and given a child to care for as well as a lover. To normalize their experience, Rule acknowledges the likelihood that relationships like theirs were common during the war. But the ambivalence toward motherhood, even motherhood in its most symbolic terms, remains.

Ann is disturbed by her attachment because sex represents freedom and disentanglement for her. That she would come to love Evelyn is inconceivable to begin with, and she imagines smashing the image of Evelyn, then seeing "the shattered mother with slight distaste or distant curiosity, a little disappointed, vastly relieved" (126). To need each other is, ultimately, to need an image of themselves to which they can attest and refer. The "mother" and the "daughter" are ambivalent because their feelings are at odds with the expectations and threaten their freedom.[27]

But even with all this ambivalence toward the symbolism and naturalization of motherhood, Rule does not foreclose their desire to have children. To do so would be destructive of the definitional possibilities of Rule's queer productiveness. It is motherhood on their own terms, though. Besides Evelyn's own continued desire for children after her miscarriage, there is Ann's desire to have children: "Ann might not know what it was to have a child and want it to live, but she must know what it was to want a child. Any woman knew that. And there was a generalization about womanhood that even Evelyn could share" (70). Even if this particular generalization seems destructive of any libratory purpose because it reinforces motherhood as a desirable and necessary end, Rule is careful about how motherhood is manifest in her characters. Ann, in particular, is a mother in ways that queer the multiple "requirements" for motherhood: she does not conceive children through heterosexual intercourse; she does not "raise" her children herself; and the children themselves take on various, remarkable forms. In fact, as other critics have pointed out, Ann's change apron is like a pregnancy, a "fetus in its

[27] In Donna Deitch's film adaptation of the novel, the two actresses who play Ann and Evelyn are pointed different in appearance—one blonde (Helen Shaver), the other brunette (Patricia Charbonneau). The film eschews the fact that the two resemble each other to the point of appearing as mother and daughter. Is this because, when visualized, the discomfort of the possible incestuous connotations of the relationship (in addition to the same-sex dimension) is too much for a mass film audience?

seventh month," leading to "her back burning, the veins in her legs aching with the drag of sixty pounds of dead weight: the ironic emancipation of woman, martyred to nothing but her own belligerence, surely" (96). In this arrangement, Ann's burden is both her freedom and her confinement. The cartoons she draws to sell function in much the same way. Even if she does not reproduce in a traditional sense, her work is productive.

The "easiest and cheapest" way for Ann to have children is to sponsor them in other countries: "They're so little nuisance. A letter and a check a month is all they need" (72). She is free to love them as she wants. But it is Ann's justification that is most interesting: "With all the surplus children in the world—they're being dumped in India and China the way we dump wheat—I figure motherhood should become a specialized profession like medicine or law for people really suited to it" (72). Even though Ann's reasons border on justifying eugenics, she is queering motherhood as a notion *required* of all women, everywhere. Ann further explains that sponsoring the children is "[c]hildbirth without pain, Motherhood without guilt, Mother without child. […] I wonder if I could get that: 'Mother without Child.' If I got it, I couldn't sell it" (123). What Ann is suggesting is entirely radical. She upsets the declared semantic and physical meaning of Motherhood, not just adopting the term for her own purposes but also inserting the term within an almost entirely monetary. She claims one can be a Mother by merely writing a check every month and that she is a *Mother* and not just a sponsor. Motherhood is not a rigid definitive role for Ann.

In fact, Rule often acknowledges the fluidity of human sexuality in Evelyn, Ann—whom it is important to remember is, by definition, bisexual—and Bill, Ann's one-time lover. Even when Bill threatens to expose Evelyn and Ann's relationship to the

divorce attorney, he does so not because of a general abhorrence for and rejection of lesbianism but rather because of his jealousy toward Evelyn. Bill's is the most forceful reaction that Ann and Evelyn's relationship receives. Rule herself admits "the only valid criticism" she got about the novel is "that there's no hostility surrounding Evelyn and Ann" ("What Can Be" 24). The reason? According to Rule, "So many people in those days were trying to get sympathy for homosexuals by showing how mean everyone was to them. I didn't want to get into propaganda. I wanted them to say what they really would say and feel what they would really feel. I consciously didn't want to drag in a lot of social pressure to overshadow that" ("What Can Be" 24). That is to say, Rule is deeply invested in showing and supporting queerness as a means rather than an end. But although Bill ultimately does not expose Ann and Evelyn's affair, Evelyn generally recognizes that "the world would not let them alone for long" because clearly:

> marriage is the best life for a woman. Clichés were only a sin in literature. In life, if they happened to be true, there was no intellectual campaign that would defeat them. Did she think that marriage was the best life for a woman? Of course. She believed it just as she believed that this huge, penny arcade was not, as Ann would have it, only another of the mansions of God. As Ann would have it. […] And she would not argue against marriage. She would say, "for the while then." And, if ever she wanted to marry, Evelyn would let her go. (213-14)

Perhaps this is a surprising thing to see from Evelyn, but we must remember not only Evelyn's strict ambivalence surrounding her divorce but also Rule's unwillingness to cast queerness as the only legitimate option.

In this way, queer sexuality does not become stable and accepted but rather

"uncontained and unpredictable," as John P. Elia explains in his work on queer relationships (80). He claims that on a "very practical level," queer relationships are often "extraordinarily difficult" because they "lack the 'security' and 'anchor' that are features of so many relationships" (80-1). At the same time I feel Elia might be overstating the instability and potential danger of queer relationships, I think his claim holds some legitimacy, particularly if we consider it in context with the novel's queer relationships. Bill, it seems, despite his obvious love for Ann and his desire to marry her, goes "from whore to homosexual back to Ann again. He was incapable of understanding a woman who did not want to marry, who could not marry a man she loved" (34).[28] When Ann and Bill become domesticated, living together for a brief time in Silver's home, Ann begins to chafe under the pressure of domestication because she thinks marriage "just is wrong for *some* women" (41, my emphasis). Ann cannot be domesticated not because Rule deems the entire category of marriage as invalid but because Ann does not want to be "kept," and "[s]he would struggle to get away, to be born again into that live uncertainty of her single flesh" (42).

Particularly through the character of the bisexual Silver, lover to Ann and wed to Joe and pregnant with his child by the end of the novel, Rule lends tolerance to those willing to speak in both terms of institutionalized heterosexuality and motherhood as well as queer sexuality. "Men were my profession," admits Silver, "I always had a woman until Joe" (41). Because she does not want to be "kept," Ann poses a particular problem

[28] Adrienne Rich provides an apt way of examining the relationship between Ann and Bill in her article entitled "Motherhood: The Contemporary Emergency and the Quantum Leap": "Gynephobia supposes the eternal, universal guilt of women, and most women carry in us a learned, internalized version of that guilt. Maternal guilt is perhaps the most familiar to many of us; but many also know the guilt leveled at the woman who affirms herself, who is centered-in-herself, and who, in a woman-hating environment, dares to love herself and other women. It is ironic, to say the least, that the first verbal attacked slung at the woman who demonstrates primary loyalty to herself and other women is *man-hater*" (264).

for Silver's idea of heterosexual monogamy. Silver names Ann "Little Fish" because she is slippery, wild, and not easily caught and because, as Silver claims, "You think God made even the desert for you to swim in. But you want to be free" (43). But still, despite her regard for Ann, Silver trades her free-wheeling lifestyle for the legitimation that marriage will bring her (and because she is pregnant with Joe's child). Unlike Silver, Ann is not in a position to "make an honest woman" of Evelyn through the institutional legitimation of marriage. But Silver's admission that "the bride and the groom have the privilege of at least fifteen minutes in which to contemplate what a sick, sick, fucking, Christ-awful thing getting married is" signals something slightly sinister about the state of marriage. Despite her reluctance toward and seeming abhorrence of matrimony, Silver recognizes the value of its legitimacy in the eyes of the state (196). Because, as Joe points out, "she couldn't adopt [Ann], she wanted a little f-f-fish of all her own, one the g-g-game warden couldn't take away" (192). "Naturally," Silver would want a child.

But part of Rule's way of naturalizing queerness can be a little reductive at times, specifically when she works to de-naturalize heterosexuality. Rule is invested in showing heterosexuals and breeders as engaged in less than ideal lifestyles. It is the heteronormative, traditionally reproductive relationships in the novel that are the most death-dealing, and it is the heterosexist drive which colors all notions of the destruction of not just nature but life itself. It is the heterosexuals and parents in the novel who are death-dealing, despite their reproduction and tendencies toward futurity. Virginia Ritchie, awaiting her own divorce at Frances Packer's boarding house, attempts suicide because she cannot imagine a life not married to her husband. Tellingly, Virginia's suicide attempt comes directly after Ann's discussion about her own formulation of

motherhood (the sponsorship of foreign children in need). Although the attempt is unsuccessful and Virginia eventually recovers and returns to her husband and children, Ann is enraged at Virginia's foolhardiness. In response to the attempt, Ann angrily explains, "I love life. Despair always makes me angry. It's the one sin I believe in" (74). To take one's own life, especially out of despair at what Virginia experienced—anxiety about her pending divorce and the separation from her children—is an outrage to Ann. Irritated at the inadequacies of certain mothers, Ann wonders, "Why save Virginia Ritchie's life? I should have slashed deeper, made a decent job of it, let life out of that house of petty horrors, the female body" (78). Ann's cynicism is apparent here, and it is tellingly in response to women who have lost control over their own bodies and their own fates. Giving birth to children is yet another manner of losing control over one's body, since "[h]aving opened her thighs to that faltering hero, your father, having swelled and ripened to your appalling birth, *she has to love you*. If she has eaten off your arm or your leg, if she consumed you altogether, you must understand that she is nothing more than a young animal herself, ignorant, clumsy, hungry. She has needs of her own. Of course, she loves you; *you're one of them*" (78, my emphases). This "young animal" is a reversal of Ann's own animality, and her fecundity is a mindless obligation. The mother's prescribed fecundity is destructive, unlike the productive barrenness represents by Ann's desert space. There is no choice here for either mother or child. It is their biological determination, the fact that, despite the mother's own needs and selfishness, the children *belong* to her by way of biology and by way of force.[29] "You're one of them," Ann

[29] Through the relationship of Frances Packer, owner of the boarding house in Reno at which Evelyn stays, and her "adopted" daughter Ann, Rule illustrates not just the possibility of a kind of disruptive motherhood but also a parentage of convenience. Evelyn is sympathetic to Frances's position as a "poor, guilty non-mother" of Ann who "worshiped a great neon cross that hummed above the church door, and waited, idling

concludes, emphasis, I would argue on "them," as if identification with breeding and the institution of motherhood has condemned all.

To that end, biological parentage is referred to in terms of confinement and those who bear children lose their autonomy, while queer relationships somehow always remain libratory.[30] After learning of Ann's abuse by her father, dead by suicide for many years, Evelyn imagines him as "[i]conoclast, petty devil, preaching anarchy and practicing law, he had uprooted the tree, preyed on his daughter, not for her" (62). Evelyn sees the injuries visited upon Ann by her father as inexcusable. But not only that, Ann herself sees the responsibilities of biological parenting as an act that creates entrapment for both parent and child. When her father was alive, "he had borne down on her like the weight of gravity, had given her substance, had caged her in the knowledge of her own flesh. While he lived, her world was the prison of his need" (76). But with his

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among memories and wishes, to be redeemed by a dream out of *Ladies' Home Journal*" (62). Frances's own confession of being a "very narrow, silly woman" and "not really a mother, not really a friend, just a pair of hands and a familiar face" indicates her discomfort with the parental responsibility for a daughter to whom she did not give birth (59). It is also indicative of awareness of the cliché that motherhood is only achieved biologically. Her guilt and doubt comes from the combined awareness of her real and perceived position as "non-mother." Even though Frances realizes, "One thing he taught me, one thing Reno taught me is that conventions can be a kind of trap," she also forgets this because "I want Ann to be happy, so I want her to have a beautiful, white wedding in a church. […] Thinking about a wedding is really just a way of thinking about love, isn't it? It's love I want for Ann. I don't think I really care very much how she gets it" (60). Frances is in a kind of in-between space—not mother yet mother, unconventional yet still clinging to certain conventions, not desirous of a stable, heterosexual marriage for Ann yet desiring it all the same. The key is her awareness of these inconsistencies.

But it is her role as boarding house keeper and witness in divorce court that marks Frances as stuck in a cyclical process of undoing marriage conventions by conventional means. It is a dreadful cycle to her, this undoing, and the movement of the cycle is an endless, non-productive one that restricts liberty for heterosexuals and breeders. Even Walter, her biological son, appears to Evelyn as one of the "anonymous youngsters who lounged somehow comfortably in the restrictive chairs at the back of her lecture room day after day, year after year, repeating and spreading themselves like perennials," much like the students in George's classroom in Isherwood's *A Single Man* (9-10). Certainly, there seems little hope at this point for the redemption of Francis's conventions. Without the security of marriage herself (she and Ann's father never married), Francis is dangerously close to completely losing her conventional being.

[30] Janet and Ken are another example of a heterosexual couple with which Rule cautiously sympathizes. They are "buying their child's life on the installment plan without so much as a thirty-day guarantee," and when the child succumbs to his illness, Rule treats the event with compassion (24). Ann is outraged at the unfairness of Janet and Ken's loss, but she is at the same time disgusted by the financial rigmarole through which the couple has to go because they are chained to their child.

absence, she "was at least now a journeyman and could choose the need she served. It was her own" (76). Here, with her father at least, reproduction becomes a mutually realized trap between parent and child.

While the novel leaves the hopes of a long-term relationship between Ann and Evelyn less definitive, the relationship is by no means discounted because it *may* lack endurance. Because of this lack, their relationship reinforces Halberstam's idea in *In a Queer Time and Space* that heteronormative narratives favor longevity because of their fixation on the future. But it is in the very consummation of this relationship between the "mother" and her "daughter" that these notions of the queer family become even more complicated. As many of the novel's characters point out, Ann resembles Evelyn in a way that makes them think they might be mother and daughter. They both acknowledge this too, and Ann's own justification for sleeping with Evelyn: "I've always made love with women to prove to myself that they aren't, after all, the mother I'm supposed to be looking for, to prove that she doesn't exist. So you could probably say my loving of you is a perversion and a destructive one" (166-7). The theory is a telling one—Ann's lesbian relationships stem, by her own admission, from a desire to "destroy" her mother. But Ann immediately discounts the Freudian theory behind her lesbianism. While Evelyn believes herself confined to "a classic case history" in which she is "doomed to inadequacy and sterility," Ann points out that she is "not in a textbook" but is instead "a human being" (167). The textbook and case histories imply convention while being a human being suggests sexual freedom and queer possibilities. Whereas Wittig explains in "The Straight Mind," "[D]iscourses of heterosexuality oppress us in the sense that they prevent us from speaking unless we speak in their terms," Rule is still willing to speak in

heterosexual terms even if only secondarily (25). Rule herself says something similar by explaining, "As physical creatures, we react to sexual stimulus. So it's probably true that we are capable of responding sexually to either sex. Of course the predisposition for reproduction is heterosexual so the majority of people move in that direction" ("What Can Be" 25). That is to say, Rule is unwilling to give either heterosexual or homosexual practice full credence. Instead, Rule values and legitimates both lifestyle choices and identities.

In all the talk of deconstructing and challenging convention, Rule finally remains an author largely invested in the destruction of binarisms and the institutionalization of aspects of human life she believes should be opened and libratory.[31] Through the traditionally "barren" spaces of the desert and its lake, Rule rearranges notions of naturalness with include the queering of the environment and the acceptance of lesbian relationships. Besides challenging the established conventions of femininity that are often intrinsically linked with biological motherhood and fecundity. With Christopher

[31]I will here include a few more contemporary reviews that I think, either directly or not, get to the larger historical question of Rule's first novel. These reviews are meant to illustrate either that which Rule was fighting against in the publication of her first novel or what she achieves, despite cultural expectations. The reviews bring up issues I have either acknowledged or ignored in my own work, and I openly admit to the latter fact. I will eschew it for the moment, though, in order to make clear the reception Rule's fairly controversial novel received in 1964. More than one reviewer notes the "haziness" or even ineptitude with which Rule treats her male characters, particularly Ann's father and Evelyn's husband. This, I believe, is not symptomatic of Rule's inability to write *about* men (in fact, her male characters in *This Is Not For You* are often better written and developed than the female characters) but illustrates the secondariness of relationships involving men to both Ann and Evelyn. One reviewer points out that "if Ann's name were Albert, there wouldn't be any story at all," meaning the lesbian relationship in the novel is merely incidental (Levin). Or, as another reviewer puts it, "The Lesbian theme is of specialized interest at best" (Bresler). Anne Penta is slightly more forgiving, stating, "This startlingly explicit novel of lesbian love is neither an apology or indictment. It is an objective portrayal of love between two women," but later in the review, she suggests that the novel "is not recommended to those who find sexual perversion an uncomfortable subject." Clearly, the pathologizing of "sexual perversion," even in fictional forms, was still valued. While Donald Stephens sees the novel's humor as its greatest asset, he also acknowledges the strength of Rule's use of landscape in her representations of characters: "the sterile landscape on a sterile landscape, the desert of Reno which becomes the desert of the heart […] all work together to *dissolve* eventually into a whole impression of the world as Jane Rule sees it in this book" (64). And despite the obvious preoccupation with the "Lesbian theme," the reviewers manage to acknowledge Rule's effort in *Desert* in taking on the wide range political and social norms.

Salvesan's apt interpretation, we get the impression that reviewers were not wholly unsympathetic to Rule's vision: "Gradually [Evelyn] realises her marriage has been a 'long detour' from her original nature. The conflict between what she knows to be natural and what she believes to be right is worked out on the equivocal stages of the Nevada desert and the gambling-club." I include Salvesan's contemporary review as a way of finally acknowledging the work Rule did to challenge the associations of lesbianism with abnormality and unnaturalness, reclaiming it, and queerness largely, to a realm deemed libratory, open to interpretation, responsive to the wide range of notions of the natural, sometimes slippery and not without its uncertainty but always life affirming.

CHAPTER IV

"THEY'RE BORN ALREADY RULE AND MEASURED": THE QUEERNESS OF THINNESS IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S *THE EDIBLE WOMAN*

> Whenever we treat women's bodies as aesthetic objects without function we deform them and their owners. Whether the curves imposed are the ebullient arabesques of the tit-queen or the attenuated coils of art-nouveau they are deformations of the dynamic, individual female body, and limitations of the possibilities of being female.
>
> —Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch*

> The war between the sexes began with the sinking of male teeth into a female apple. Pluto lured Persephone to hell with six pomegranate seeds. Once she had eaten them the bargain was unbreakable. To eat was to seal one's doom. —Erica Jong, *Fear of Flying*

> Please note that although men are made from dust, women are made from ribs. Remember that at your next Texas-style barbecue!
>
> –Margaret Atwood, "Making a Man"

In Margaret Atwood's 1969 novel *The Edible Woman*, Clara, the constantly pregnant friend of the novel's main character, Marian, lives in a house that is littered with "empty bottles of all kinds, beer bottles, milk bottles, wine and scotch bottles, and baby bottles" (27). The invocation of the bottle reflects Clara herself—a vessel to be filled and emptied continually. Usually thin, the pregnant Clara "looked like a boa-constrictor that has swallowed a watermelon," and her body, thusly described, is a grotesquerie (28). She

is her pregnancy and the possibly "parasitic growth like galls on a tree, or elephantiasis of the navel, or a huge bunion," which Marian speculates she is growing inside her (121). She ostensibly reproduces without thought, and languishes "as though she herself was being dragged slowly down into the gigantic pumpkin-like growth that was enveloping her body" (121).[1] Of Clara's passivity and loss of subjectivity, Marian observes, "During the later, more vegetable stage of Clara's pregnancy she had tended to forget that Clara had a mind at all or any perceptive faculties above the merely sentient and sponge-like, since she had spent most of her time being absorbed in, or absorbed by her tuberous abdomen" (140). Clara even describes her own children (in a reversal of the Mrs. Strunk's valorization of Benny in *A Single Man*) in disparaging terms, likening them to parasites. Using terms that could be mistaken for entities relating to nature, Clara always employs with joyful disdain. The smallest baby is a "little leech […] all covered in suckers like an octopus" and unwilling to detach itself from the weary mother (28). They are also "barnacles encrusting a ship and limpets clinging to a rock" (33). In describing them thus, Clara is ascribing to her children a false naturalness; they are not to be associated with natural entities but rather they are perversions of them.[2]

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[1] But Joe, Clara's husband, seems to understand the disparity between women's "feminine role" and "her core": "[H]er feminine role demands passivity from her […] So she allows her core to get taken over by her husband. And when the kids come, she wakes up one morning and discovers she does not have anything left inside, she's hollow, she doesn't know who she is anymore; her core has been destroyed" (259-60). That is, the woman's autonomy is taken over by her obligations to husband, home, and children so that there is nothing left for herself so that Clara herself is disembodied and challenged.

[2] In fact, Clara's oldest child, Arthur is in turn a "little demon," a "little turd," and a "furtive little bastard."He refuses to be toilet-trained (read: civilized), and his tendency to shit in the garden is interpreted by his mother in this manner: "He's a real nature-child, he just loves to shit in the garden […] He thinks he's a fertility-god. If we didn't clean up this place would be one big manure field" (31). Clara's attempt to put a positive spin on Arthur's disobedience only manages to create arbitrary definitions of the civilized/unnatural and the natural because it turns out Arthur pees behind doors in the house as well. Children are monstrous throughout the novel, particularly the landlady's daughter, known only as "the child." A "hulking creature of fifteen or so," the girl, as Marian observes, "I'm sure she's quite normal, but there's something cretinous about the hair-ribbon perched up on top of her gigantic body" (*Edible Woman* 6). The mother displays her disapproval for Ainsley and Marian's lifestyle because "whatever happened

As Clara gives birth to more children, all evidence of her subjectivity dissolves "a grim but inert fatalism" regarding her procreation (33). A "queen ant, bulging with the burden of an entire society, a semi-person," Clara is the embodiment of abject excess and overreproductive fertility (122). Reminiscent of Doris's "gross, insucking vulva" in *A Single Man* and Ann's repulsion for the recklessness of negligent mothers in *Desert of the Heart*, Clara is a mindless breeder and consumer. The wastefulness of her procreative lifestyle is evident not just in the above description of the bottles but also in Clara's brand of household management: "Her messiness […] was passive. She simply stood helpless while the tide of dirt rose around her, unable to stop it or evade it. The babies were like that too; her body seemed somehow beyond her, going its own way without reference to any direction of hers" (34).[3]

Nonetheless, the obsession with Clara's physical shape, the absorption of her personhood into her abdomen, and her tendency toward waste are not incidental. The novel centers of Marian McAlpin who, soon after she becomes engaged to the "well-packaged" Peter, loses her ability to eat anything beginning with meat, then eggs, and finally anything she pictures as once living. Working in urban Toronto[4] for Seymour Surveys, a market research company, Marian likes with her roommate Ainsley, who plots and finally achieves pregnancy herself. At first, Marian appears to have the typical life of

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the child's innocence must not be corrupted" (7).

[3] In this scene, Clara wears a maternity smock in a flower and vine pattern. Marian observes the dress and imagines the vines coming alive, much like to the dangerous and deptive wallpaper pattern in the proto-feminist short story by Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper."

[4] Examining the long and complex histories of the environmental or queer movements in Canada in the 1960s is beyond the scope of the present chapter. For further reading on Canada during the Cold War, see *Love, Hate and Fear in Canada's Cold War*, edited by Richard Cavell, Bryan D. Palmer's *Canada's 1960s: The Ironies of Identity in a Rebellious Era*, and Reginald Whitaker's *Cold War Canada: The Making of a National Insecurity State, 1945-1957* and *Canada and the Cold War*. See also Mary Louise Adams's *The Trouble with Normal: Postwar Youth and the Making of Heterosexuality* for a discussion about rhetoric employed by Canada's mainstream media to inform its youth about "normal" sexuality.

a young woman in the 1960s: she has graduated from college to a mediocre job, is engaged, and plans on leaving her job after her marriage. An affair with Duncan, a graduate student, and her constant flight from her fiancée are the first signs that something is awry in her life. She starts seeing Peter as a threat to her existence, and she becomes disembodied and anxious about her impending marriage. Marian begins to recoil at what she sees as prescribed roles for women, particularly those embodied by Clara and Ainsley. The conclusion of the novel is the titular scene. Marian methodically and carefully bakes a woman in the shape of a cake and offers it first to Peter, who flees from her presumably never to be seen again. She then eats the lower half of the cake herself, sharing the top half with Duncan.

As this culminating moment would suggest, the novel is bound up in the politics of eating, both its action and its consequences. Through the metaphor of food, Atwood recognizes the anxieties associated with consumption, through its multiple deployments, for a marriageable woman in the 1960s. What is consumed in the novel, as well as how, when, and why, reveals the tensions relating to both environment and sexual mores. Most critics[5] have read Marian's inability to eat as a disorder, namely anorexia, that has

[5] There have been many critics who have read Atwood's novels through various interdisciplinary perspectives, which highlight the complexities of Atwood's subjects. Amongst the examinations that utilize the clinical definition and cultural analyses of anorexia nervosa and its relationship to resistance of patriarchy are: Elspeth Camerons' "Famininity, or Parody of Autonomy: Anorexia Nervosa and *The Edible Woman*"; Tracy Brain's "Figuring Anorexia: Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman*"; Murari Prasad's "*The Edible Woman*: Margaret Atwood's Proto-Feminist Narrative"; and Alejandra Moreno Alvarez's "Subversive Literaure: Uses and Abuses of Food in Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman*." Emma Parker's "You Are What You Eat: The Politics of Eating in the Novels of Margaret Atwood" is a gloss on the role of food in various works. Parker simplistically argues "eating is unequivocally political" and that for Atwood's heroines the "mouth also becomes an emotional center" (349, 359). I say "simplistically" because Parker's work addresses a wide range of the role of eating in Atwood's novels and ignores the complexities inherent in the politics of eating, the mouth, the stomach, and the choice of sustenance in these various novels. For an article on the use of quantum physics in Atwood's works, see "Science for Feminists: Margaret Atwood's Body of Knowledge" by June Deery. For a reading of Atwood through the crime novel genre, see Lorna Irvine's "Murder and Mayhem: Margaret Atwood Deconstructs." And for a look at *The Edible Woman* and its relationship to political feminism, see M. Prabhakar's "Margaret

been the result of a controlling and inescapable patriarchy. The idea is that Marian, unable to cope with the pressures of her impending marriage or to escape the prescriptions of postwar womanhood, begins to suffer from anorexia. It is the specific shape of Marian's apparent anorexia, or what I will call the queerness of her thin body, that forms the crux of my argument.

In reading it with the tenets of queer ecocriticism in mind,[6] *The Edible Woman* becomes not just a novel about a young woman in the 1960s suffering from culturally induced anorexia as a result of her revulsion for marriage and traditional female roles. Introducing the possibility of queerness into the novel reveals a deep and abiding response to forced gender roles, and an ecological reading reveals the destruction and wastage wrought by the socially sanctioned consumerism for which heterosexual people are accountable. Her concern, as she begins to be able to eat less and less, turns to whether or not she is "normal," and her attempts to convey traditional femininity go awry.[7] I read Marian's "eating disorder" as a pronounced and self-aware embrace of

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Atwood's *The Edible Woman*: Guide to Feminism."

[6] Atwood's work is no stranger to analysis by ecocriticism, as she often engages in analysis of human's tendency toward waste and want. In 1994's *Good Bones and Simple Murders*, Atwood includes a piece entitled "We Want It All" in which she describes the human impact on the earth in terms of wanting to both preserve nature and completely use it up. "We were too good at what we did," Atwood objects, "at being fruitful, at multiplying, and now there's too much breathing" (155). But it is not just reproduction to blame but also our insatiable tendency to want more *stuff* for ourselves, including everything contained within the natural world: "We want to take it all in, for one last time, we want to eat the world with our eyes. Better than the mouth, my darling. Better than the mouth" (155). In the 1977 short story "Giving Birth," the main character, Jeanie, after having a child, observes from her hospital window the fragility of the natural world: "…the entire earth, the rocks, people, trees, everything needs to be protected, cared for, tended. The enormity of the task defeats her; she will never be up to it, and what will happen then?" (*Dancing Girls* 240). While this observation can certainly be read as affirmative of reproduction (her consciousness about the stewardship of the natural world changes because she has a child to consider), the fact remains that she is not empowered by her observation of the vastness of the natural world.

[7] Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* contains a description of the split image of the woman of the 1950s and 60s: It "opens a different fissure—the feminine woman, whose goodness includes the desires of the flesh, and the career woman, whose evil includes every desire of the separate self" (95). This career woman is de-feminized because of her desire to be something other than a wife who pleases her husband sexually and a mother who sacrifices her self for her children. She is made "devil" because of her "dream of independence, the discontent of spirit, and even the feeling of a separate identity that must be exorcised to

queerness and a resistance to the prescribed and naturalized roles of wife and mother. Maggie Humm aptly points out, "Atwood parodies cultural definitions of the natural […] while at the same time associating women, specifically mothers, with the eventfulness of the natural world in recurrent images of amoebae and fetuses" (126). In her use of "binary opposites […] exaggeration and inverted stereotypes," Atwood "dismiss[es] an easy essentialism in favour of a more complex account of female representation" (132). Shannon Hengen reveals, "Being human to Atwood clearly implies acceptance of the whole range of our physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual state. To deny or splice out any of that state is to amputate the self as it has been known so far, and so to stress nature perilously" ("Margaret Atwood and Environmentalism" 74). To include the full range of experience, and indeed to revise and resist the constraints of expectation is engaging with the entirety of experience. "As whole creatures," Hengen continues, "we both affect and are affected by the larger environment in which we evolve, and her work asks us to keep that interconnectedness firmly in mind" (84). This being said, Marian has a fraught relationship with her job at Seymour Surveys, the market research firm.[8]

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win or keep the love of husband and child" (95). What Friedan is suggesting, however implicitly, is that this split cannot be contained or accepted in the same woman. Such a black and white division of "good" woman versus "bad" woman plays an interesting role in *The Edible Woman*. Marian is described as so "sensible" by her fiancée who clearly buys into this split image. She is pragmatic about marriage and domesticity, Peter suggests, because she is willing (at least on the surface and in the beginning) to go along with what he says and allow him to plan their lives. She will quit her job after marriage—it is expected of her. In her response to Friedan's book, Joanne Meyerowitz reveals that, through the "true stories" presented by middle-class mainstream women's magazines, women were often portrayed outside the home in work environments. However, Meyerowitz reveals these women, successful as they might be in public domains, conformed to "traditional gender distinctions": "[N]umerous authors described their successful subjects as pretty, motherly, shapely, happily married, petite, charming, or soft voiced" (233). All of this added up to "a submerged fear of lesbian, mannish, or man-hating women" in these otherwise subversive narratives (233).

[8] One of the ways she resists fully engaging in the firm's activities is by refusing to apply for their Pension Plan, a sure sign of the restriction and confines of her job. After she signs that Pension Plan under a bit of duress, Marian imagines a very different kind of environment: "Somewhere in front of me, a self was waiting, pre-formed, a self who had worked during innumerable years for Seymour Surveys and was now receiving her reward. A pension. I foresaw a bleak room with a plug-in heater. Perhaps I would have a hearing aid, like one of my great-aunts who had never married. I would talk to myself; children would

Marian's particular department is made-up mostly of housewives who "don't make much but they like to get out of the house" (*Edible Woman* 14). A map above Marian's desk tracks the women involved in testing products, marking out the territory and prevalence of consumers. But many of the foods she is asked to test or make questionnaires for are unnatural, prepackaged and mass-produced. The convenience of these foods reveals to whom the products are marketed—busy and overwhelmed mothers and housewives who crave convenience and cost-effectiveness. As for the women who test the products, "Those who get asked the questions don't get paid at all," and Marian suspects that women participate in the surveys because "they like to have someone to talk to" (14). But the artificiality of such foods is evident when the company dietitian, a woman with a "Betty Grable hairdo and open-toed pumps," asks Marian to test the canned rice pudding (11-2). When asked whether the color of the rice pudding is "Natural, Somewhat Artificial, or Definitely Unnatural," Marian replies with discomfort, and it appears that the prepackaged rice pudding is unappetizing. As much as the company claims to be interested in what "real" people like from their consumer products, they are more invested in maintaining and reinforcing stereotypes, particularly that of the consumerist housewife. The research firm is primarily invested in not just marketing to women and families the necessity of acquiring the products they are testing but also appealing to a larger ideal: the good of womankind. Surveys about sanitary napkins are sent to women with the incentive of "how they must all do their best to better the lot of Womankind—an attempt to appeal, Marian reflected, to the embryonic noble nurse that is supposed to be curled, efficient, and self-sacrificing, in the heart of every true woman" (116).

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throw snowballs at me. I told myself not to be silly, the world would probably blow up between now and then" (15).

In fact, through her other female characters, Atwood challenges the naturalization of various gender roles, that a "true woman" exists. Much of Marian's anxiety is centered on not just the rhetoric of motherhood and the consumerism linked with household management but also the subjugation to which women are exposed because of their biology.[9] Discussing the "sexual division of labor," Nancy Hartsock emphasizes the ways in which social roles, rather than gender, determine the ways in which men and women work. "Thus the fact that women and not men *bear* children is not (yet) a social choice," Hartsock argues, "but that women and not men rear children in a society structured by compulsory heterosexuality and male dominance is clearly a societal choice" (233). Women, like workers, operate in "a world characterized by interaction with natural substances rather than separation from nature, a world in which quality is more important than quantity, a world in which the unification of the mind and body is inherent in the activities performed" (234).[10] Specifically for Marian, the challenge

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[9] In *Of Woman Born* Adrienne Rich argues, "Women are controlled by lashing us to our bodies," and the two aspects of cultural motherhood lie within the physicality of the body: "the biological potential and capacity to bear and nourish human life, and the magical power invested in women by men, whether in the form of Goddess-worship or the fear of being controlled and overwhelmed by women" (13).

[10] Additionally, Emily Martin argues:

> Our lives have come to be organized around two realms: a private realm where women are most in evidence, where "natural" functions like sex and the bodily functions related to procreation take place, where the affective content of relationships is primary, and a public realm where men are most in evidence, where "culture" (books, schools, arts, music, science) is produced, where money is made, work is done, and where one's efficiency at producing goods or services takes precedence over one's feelings about fellow workers. (15-6)

This leads to the fragmentation and binarization of the genders and included the subjugation of women based on the assumptions of their intrinsic connections to the private realm and the affective and physical body. Martin later asks us to consider "new birth imagery" that addresses the contradictory views of birth "as concentrated life force [that] allows the mother to be either a passive vessel through which the force flows or an active participant 'riding' the energy, [while] other views place women in an unambiguously active role" (158). "Because their bodily processes go with them everywhere," Martin further explains, "forcing them to juxtapose biology and culture, women glimpse every day a conception of another sort of social order. […] When women derive their view of experience from their bodily processes as they occur in society, they are not saying 'back to nature' in anyway. They are saying on to another kind of culture, one in which our current rigid separations and oppositions are not present" (200). Likewise, Rich indicts the narrative that reinforces "Institutionalized motherhood" that itself "demands of woman maternal 'instinct' rather than intelligence, selflessness rather than self-realization, relation to others rather than the

comes when she chooses thinness as a way of opposing the shape—both material and cultural—of womanhood. The scene in which Marian purchases the ingredients for, bakes, and eats the woman-shaped cake, highlights the process of making one's ideal woman and consuming her in an attempt to fully claim her. To make herself *look* more like a man is to physically and psychologically refuse all that Peter and her impending marriage stand for: heterosexuality, family-building, reproduction and the sickening grotesqueness of pregnancy, motherhood; domesticity and the imperative to consume that is ascribed to housewives; and an ignorance of one's environmental impact. For Marian, this final point is manifest in her realization of the interrelated subjugations of women and the natural world, particularly animals.[11] Images of entrapment and parasitic bonds are used to describes heterosexual relationships, and Marian's refusal to eat becomes another facet of her resistance to the deception evident in reproduction and consumption.[12] This makes Marian's awareness of and refusal to accept her position as the hunted, the bait, and a consumable object in the novel a way in which she can express her queer resistance to the traditional formation of gender roles and the domesticity of the traditional nuclear family.

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creation of self. Motherhood is 'sacred' so long as its offspring are 'legitimate'—that is, as long as the child bears the name of a father who legally control the mother" (42).

[11] In *The Good Nature Feminist*, Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands points out, "Nature, in cultural feminism, referred to the experience of reproduction, the continuity of generations, the creation of life, the inherent bodily connection to the planet. Where men experience separation from biology, disdaining the body and the material world (and oppressing women) en route to a necrophilic transcendence of nature, women, by virtue of their reproductive labor, lived their lives through nature, through a grounding in the body and the cycles of life" (11).

[12] Discussing the issue of her ever-fluctuating weight, Isadora Wing, the main character of Erica Jong's 1973 novel *Fear of Flying*, conveys: "Excess flesh was connected with sex—that much I knew. At fourteen, when I had starved myself down to ninety-eight pounds, it was out of guilt about sex. […] I wanted to feel *empty*. Unless the hunger pangs boomed resoundingly, I hated myself for my indulgence. Clearly a pregnancy fantasy—as my husband the shrink would say—or maybe a pregnancy phobia. My unconscious believed that my jerking off Steve had made me pregnant and I was getting thinner and thinner trying to convince myself it wasn't so. Or else maybe I *longed* to be pregnant, primitively believed that all the orifices of the body were one, and feared that any food I took would seed my intestines like sperm, and fruit would grow from me" (391-2).

Recognizing the complex questions bound up in the consumption of food, scholars of eating disorders note the cultural and social complexities influencing its sufferers. In *Unbearable Weight*, Susan Bordo reveals a set of cultural contradictions surrounding women and the politics of eating:

> One the one hand, our culture still widely advertises domestic conceptions of femininity, the ideological moorings for a rigorously dualistic sexual division of labor that casts woman as chief emotional and physical nurturer. The rules for this construction of femininity (and I speak here of language both symbolic and literal) require that women learn to feed others, not the self, and to construe any desires for self-nurturance and self-feeding as greedy and excessive. Thus, women must develop a totally other-oriented emotional economy. […] On the other hand, even as young women today continue to be taught traditionally "feminine" virtues, to the degree that the professional arena is open to them, they must also learn to embody the "masculine" language and values of that arena—self-control, determination, cool, emotional discipline, mastery, and so on. (171)

Bordo argues that women have a prescribed dual role—one of the nurturer and emotional compass, the other of detached and cool public figure—that often crosses into the realm of eating and sexual and gender roles. To be anorexic in this particular environment appears to be a negation of the former and an embrace of the latter. The anorexic is caught between two other worlds: an unconscious, internalized refusal of consumption as well as a deliberate and determined ideology that labels food wicked and unnecessary. But I would argue that Marian's refusal to eat is exactly that—a refusal. While all of her internal signals, her embodied and interpolated responses, point toward helplessness and

vulnerability, there is also a deliberate, if somewhat surprised, empowerment that comes along with the refusal of consumption.

But there is another dimension to eating disorders that reveals the gender ambiguity involved in self-starvation. I include here a brief but not exhaustive reference to literature about eating disorders and what it reveals about the interrelated and often paradoxical politics of gender and eating. Exploring anorexia as a "thought disorder," Noelle Caskey notes that anorexics think of "food in highly abstract and symbolic terms which almost come to replace the act of eating itself" (183). Caskey also points out that psychoanalysis labels anorexia an "oral impregnation phobia" (175). Kim Chernin's *The Hungry Self* reveals that despite the achievements of Second Wave Feminism, women are still trapped in bodily, gendered expectations in which "[e]ating disorders express our uncertainties, our buried anguish, our unconfessed confusion of identity. So far, in our struggle for liberation, we have become women dressed in male attire and not yet, by any means, women clothed in the full potential of female being" (36-7). Women turn to men's clothing in an effort to "work over and worry at and reshape these female bodies of ours so that they can help us pretend we have managed to escape from being our mothers' daughters and have, in our appearance at least, become their sons" (37).[13]

Anorexia in Leslie Heywood's *Dedication to Hunger* is a "poverty of self-definition," and whether physical, psychological or psychosomatic, it causes women to feel that they are "lacking, insufficient, flawed as well as fetishized, commodified, loved, and sexually desired—a devastating set of contradictions" (33-4). Heywood's idea of the "metaphysics of eating" is manifest in the marked "elimination of what is considered

[13]Another interesting dimension to Chernin's argument is that principal fear expressed by women who are concerned about body size and physical appearance "has a great deal to do with being a daughter and knowing that one's life as a woman must inevitably reflect on the life of one's mother" (37).

stereotypically 'feminine' and a preference for 'the masculine'" (64-5). Further, in *Fat is a Feminist Issue*, Susie Orbach identifies the double-bind involving the sexuality of thinness—at the same time the woman believes her thinness will make her more sexually appealing to men, she fears the sexual power that thinness represents (79-80). "A curvy body," Orbach argues, "meant the adoption of a teenage girl's sexual identity" (164). Refusing food "straightens out the girl's curves," allowing her to have "a foot in both camps—the pre-adolescent boy-girl and the young attractive woman" (165). Worried about being seen, the anorectic becomes "reflected in the repeated theme of women's invisibility—wafer thinness is perhaps the quintessential expression of women's absence/presence. This forced invisibility leads in turn to a desire to be accepted and noticed for just being, rather than for having to look and be perfect and fulfill others' expectations" (169). And in *The Hunger Artists*, Maud Ellmann determines, "Self-starvation is above all a performance" (17). Anorexia is a response to patriarchal oppression in which women victimize themselves, since "they collude in their oppression by relinquishing the perilous demands of freedom in favor of the cozy compensations of infantilism" (2). Part of the anorectic's impulse is the desire to regress, to become something other than what oneself is. Further, Ellmann reveals the "incipient hostility to fat" which is now the "hallmark of modernity": "But nowadays the image of the fleshy procreative body reawakens the Malthusian anxiety that fecundity is ecologically unsound or, more specifically, that it produces *hunger*: and, as Eve Sedgwick has observed, the moral imperative to 'diet for a small planet' has transposed itself, by sleight of hand, to the clamorous demands imposed on women to 'diet for a small swimsuit'" (2).[14] It is the "thin pubescent body, phallically firm," argues Ellmann, that symbolizes

[14] Indeed, Mark Bittman's more recent and popular *Food Matters: A Guide to Conscious Eating* and

the aversion to overproduction, and, I would also add, reproduction. As Ellmann illustrates in her use of the phallic imagery of the body, the thin woman avoids the overabundance of female sexuality, with her hips and thighs and curves, by making herself look more masculine (3).[15] Note also that in some severe cases of anorexia, the menstrual period may cease altogether, making reproduction (or even the possibility of it) that much more difficult. Even if the anorectic does not deliberately adopt a more masculine looking body, there is at least a possible rejection of the infantilism that perpetuates the patriarchal desire for the young female body.

Although they do not say it outright, taken together these authors suggest that the underlying causes of anorexia and other eating disorders involve a queering of normative gender roles. As Ellman's reference to the Malthusian anxiety of the "fleshy procreative body" would suggest, the refusal or inability to eat correlates to a larger set of cultural norms. Consumption and reproduction is expected, but a refusal to eat is a denial of those two cycles.[16] From the desire to look less like a reproductive female to the rejection

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Michael Pollan's *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto* contain mantras that dictate one should "Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants" (Pollan 1). Both Pollan and Bittman highlight the importance of the ecological impact of overconsumption of food, and namely, in Pollan's case, the industrial food complex and its dependence on cheap fossil fuel which divorces American from the processes of food production and thus makes less nutritious, often too readily available and cheap. Bittman asks us to rethink consumption, identifying an intersection between our animal instinct, "coupled with our relative affluence, almost unlimited availability, and marketing that encourages us to eat the food that's most profitable for manufacturers" that is behind the obesity problem as well as the increase in greenhouse gasses. Interestingly, both agree that we should consume fewer animal-derived products, which for me has a bearing on the rhetoric and politics of meat-eating and sexuality, which is something I develop later in the chapter.

[15] Because the act of eating always involves the other—"From the beginning one eats for the other, from the other, with the other"—eating is, at its core, a representation of the "'dangerous supplement' to heterosexual relations" (Ellman 53, 57).

[16] Dealing with the way time functions in the novel, Alexandra Wolbert believes that the novel is deeply invested in cyclical time, particularly as it relates to Ainsley's menstrual cycle (173). Wolbert allows that Marian's sense of time is distorted and shifts throughout the novel, particularly in Chapter 12 in which she contemplates her engagement and her future life. The shift into the present tense in this chapter is, for Wolbert, a sign of Marian taking control of herself, and it is "Marian's meditative pause about her deeds and her future way of living" (175). Leslie Heywood identifies various psychological characteristics of anorexia, amongst them "a disruption of the sense of linear time so that the present becomes the

of traditional gender roles, which cast women as the commodified and fetishized objects of patriarchy, eating disorders contain a dual purpose: the refusal of both physical and material consumption, which brings on the environmental destruction wrought by overconsumption; and the denial of traditional femininity—namely, the roles of wife and mother—which contains the repudiation of the reproductive female and carries into an embrace of more masculine shape.

Because Marian is a pursued and consumable object in the novel, I do not read her opposition to eating as a way of removing herself from the basic animality of her existence. Gayle Greene aptly points that there are two kinds of consumption in *The Edible Woman*: "'Consuming' is a physiological process, the ingesting and digesting of food, as in Marian's reference to 'her body's consumption'; and it is a socio-economic process, the purchases and use of commodities, in which Marian is implicated both by being a young woman on 'the market' (to use her term for sexual availability) and by her work as a market researcher" (97-8).[17] The consumption of foodstuffs is the most basic act all living beings, from humans to microorganisms, share. To eat it to engage with the Other and in humans' case, the non-human (plant or animal) world. Literally, eating is the inclusion of another into one's own body, of dissolving the borders between one and

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synecdoche of the past and future and all of lived experience" as well as a "marked identification with the masculine and simultaneous rejection of the feminine, along with a paradoxical attempt to accede to beauty standards of thinness" (17-8). When Duncan says he wants to live forever because "you wouldn't have to worry about Time anymore," what he means is that he will not be subjugated to the notions of time that control his sense of futurity (*Edible Woman* 203).

[17] The term "market," for me, invokes many things, including Luce Irigaray's chapter on "Women on the Market" in *This Sex Which Is Not One*. Irigaray uses the Marxian study of the value to illustrate that women on the market as commodities have little autonomy and value outside of the man's estimations. In a society that recognizes and supports the Commodification of women, Irigaray argues, the following "presuppositions" exist: "the appropriation of nature by man; the transformation of nature according to 'human' criteria, defined by men alone; the submission of nature to labor and technology; the reduction of its material, corporeal, perceptible qualities to man's practical concrete activity" (184). Clearly, Irigaray is arguing that the language of the market and Commodification of women also implicates man in the manipulation and abuse of nature.

another. For these reasons, the act of eating seems to already be queer since it involves permeable boundaries and the taking on of another being. I would suggest, however, that Marian's removal from this scheme does not signal her denial of this most basic of environmental engagements or of the queerness that eating symbolizes. Rather, Marian recognizes that most insidious modes of abuse and overuse of the other-than-human world as well as women come in the form of consumption. In the novel, consumption is not nourishment or a respectful engagement with one's environment; rather, it has become about control and exploitation. To even engage in these cycles and acts means to be indicted with these systems.[18]

Specifically, Duncan's indictment of the cycle "production-consumption," in which Marian is an participant because of her job at the market research firm, reflects Marian's own resistance to the narrative which reinforces heterosexuality, procreation, and abuse of natural resources.[19] For Duncan, production-consumption represents a cyclical and destructive process of waste and artificiality:

You begin to wonder whether it isn't just a question of making one kind of

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[18] There is a perhaps less likely reason, but one I would still like to suggest, for Marian's self-starvation. Since the food supply is the central concern for the population bomb theorists, it seems likely that Marian is removing herself from the competition. That is, if she does not eat, she cannot be to blame for the population problem and the global lack of food.

[19]The novel on the whole, Alan Dawe states, "is about what anyone—male or female, with or without a college degree—can do to maintain his sanity and humanity in a plastic and over-packaged world that exists in the second half of the century." Dawe, in his introduction the 1969 edition of the novel, is the first to suggest, "Marian and Duncan are in some elusive way the same character," making anorexia's motions toward gender ambiguity much more significant. Whereas Brooks Bouson explains, "Duncan represents a hidden aspect of Marian's self. Occurring in the gap in the novel's realistic surface, Duncan suddenly materializes as if in response to Marian's unacknowledged needs," I would take it one step further—Duncan is not *entirely* a separate human at all but rather another facet of Marian's self (24-5). After seeing him in the laundromat (read: Marian is rebelling against the notion that women are the washers of clothing), Marian attributes their encounter and her kiss with him as "a kind of lapse, a blank in the ego, like amnesia" (109). Her conclusion that he has "nothing at all to do with Peter" is telling—this is her imaginary queer persona that exists outside of and away from Peter and his heterosexual deception. Further, "Duncan's disguise is, of course, amorphous ambiguity and anonymity," making him the ideal companion for (or, I would say, facet to) Marian's challenged and resisting identity (Page 16).

> garbage into another kind. The human mind is the last thing to be commercialized but they're doing a good job of it now; what is the difference between library stacks and one of those used-car graveyards? What bothers me though is that none of it is ever final; you can't ever finish anything. I have this great plan for permanent leaves on trees, it's a waste for them having to produce a new lot each year; and come to think of it there's not reason at all why they have to be green, either; I'd have them white. Black trunks and white leaves. I can hardly wait till it snows, the city in the summer has altogether too much vegetation, it's stifling, and then it all falls off and lies around in the gutters. The thing I like about the place I come from, it's a mining town, there isn't much of anything in it but at least it has no vegetation. A lot of people wouldn't like it. It's the smelting plants that do it, tall smokestacks reaching up into the sky and the smoke glows red at night, and the chemical fumes have burnt the trees for miles around, it's barren, nothing but the barren rock, even grass won't grow on most of it, and there are the slagheaps too; where the water collects on the rock it's a yellowish-brown from the chemicals. (*The Edible Woman* 155)

Here, Duncan is mirroring Marian's distrust of fecundity. The barrenness, unlike the desert of Reno in Rule's novel, is man-made but nonetheless desirable to Duncan. Even the most "natural" of processes—trees going new leaves every year—can be too productive in its repetitiveness. In fact, leaves falling from trees are a waste. And while some critics have read Duncan's ramblings as nonsense,[20] I quote this passage at length

[20] In her article on the nonsense of *The Edible Woman*, read through the lens of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, Glenys Stow defines the opposition of common sense and nonsense as thus: "common sense is understood to mean an approach to events of life based on logic, sensory observation and natural law. […] Nonsense is generally understood as behaviour which is contrary to logic and which plays games with

because it uncovers some of the most essential pieces of Atwood's environmental schema in the novel. Destruction is so insidious within Duncan's vision that he is unable to imagine the nonhuman *without* the human marker of pollution and artificiality. In Northrop Frye's 1971 account of Canadian imagination, the "garrison mentality" signifies the "communities that provide all that their members have in the way of distinctively human values, and that are compelled to feel a great respect for the law and order that holds them together, yet confronted with a huge, unthinking, menacing and formidable physical setting" (225).[21] This distrust of the natural world, something Frye sees as uniquely Canadian, breeds "a closely knit and beleaguered society" in which "one is either a fighter or a deserter" (226). Duncan is somehow both. Duncan is not, then, anti-natural because it is impossible to pint down what his perception of the natural is. Rather than attempting to conceive of a pristine nature in his hometown, he sees the process of mining as inevitable, and he acquiesces and even enjoys it.[22] Making one kind

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the laws of nature and the reports of the senses, resulting in bizarre interpretations of life" (95). For these reasons, I claim Atwood's use of nonsense, her employment of "reversal, exaggeration, incongruity, and arbitrary sequence" as queer (Stow 91). Many critics have also pointed the connection between Atwood's fiction and fairy tales. Sharon Rose Wilson suggests it has something to do with Atwood's incorporation of fairy tales in her work: "Preserved, baked in a witch's oven, and eventually served as food, Marian is, by turns, the Gingerbread Woman, Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, Rapunzel, Goldilocks, Alice in Wonderland, Little Red Cap, the Pumpkin-eater's wife, Gretel, Fitcher's bride, and, especially, the Robber Bride" (86). Atwood's awareness of fairy tales and her use of nonsense signal the important dream-like representations of her novels.

[21] I also want to mention Atwood's own idea that nature in Canadian novels "is often dead and unanswering or actively hostile to man; or, seen in its gentler spring and summer aspects, unreal. There is a sense in Canadian literature that the true and only season here is winter: the others are either preludes to it or mirages concealing it" (Atwood, *Survival* 49). Modern Toronto is a polluted, hazy, dusty and hot city, and walking around is "almost like moving underwater" (26). Duncan says it is like "being in a fishbowl full of dying pollywogs" (285). Duncan takes Marian to his favorite place in the city (in fact, they escape to it, as he says), and it turns out to be a "field of tall weed-stalks whose stiff dried branches scraped against them as they passed: goldenrod, teazles, burdocks, the skeletons of anonymous grey plants" (287). Everything here is "so thick with green leaves and stuff you can't see three feet in front of you," but the place is also a refuge for the winos (288). "They're beginning to fill this place up with junk too, you know," laments Duncan, "beginning with the creek, I wonder why they like throwing things around all over the landscape…old tires, tins cans…" (288).

[22] While Ronald B. Hatch claims *The Edible Woman* does not discuss the function of land, he does call for a recognition of Atwood's ability "to break down the too easy assumption that the individual is a being

of garbage into another kind has become the natural condition of the country. Consumerism, in this case the conversion of ores into use by people, has made the logical and intrinsic end of human's destructive means.[23]

Duncan's modification of the descriptions with which Marian presents him when gathering consumer information for Moose Beer is indicative of his refusal to be defined as a masculine consumer. He finds joy in reversing the meaning of the slogans of Moose Beer when Marian is asked to pre-test it to men in the community. The Moose Beer jingle reveals that the brand is deeply invested in reinforcing traditional notions of manliness. Moose Beer is "[*f]rom the land of pine and spruce,/Tingly, heady, rough-and-ready*" (21). "Real" men drink Moose Beer on "a real man's holiday," which includes hunting and fishing. But Duncan, ever ready to subvert gendered expectations and revise stereotypes, claims the phrase "Deep-down manly flavour" actually evokes "sweat. […] Canvas gym shoes. Underground locker-rooms and jock-straps" (51). He imagines the "tang of wilderness" not as an essence in the beer but as "a dog, part wolf, part husky, who saves his master three times, once from fire, once from flood and once from wicked humans, more likely to be white hunters than Indians these days, and finally gets blasted by a cruel trapper with a .22 and wept over. Buried, probably in the snow. Panoramic shot of trees and lake. Sunset. Fade out" (53). His reproduction of the image is not productive—it is destructive. Duncan subverts the prescribed naturalness of the

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entirely separate from his or her environment" and that Atwood's embrace of the tenets of the ecocentrist writers discards the anthropomorphic position that reinserts human beings into the wheel of life (181). In fact, in *Surfacing*, "Evocative descriptions of the wild natural settings of this novel serve as counterpoint to the empty and often hurtful exchanges between human characters" (Hengen, "Margaret Atwood and Environmentalism" 79).

[23] In a 1970 review of the novel, Millicent Bell points out, "We are prone these days to gloomy laughter or comic despair as we consider our lives in consumerdom, the country where in the end we find ourselves consumed—that is, converted into waste by the things we acquire, the goods and packaged ideas dispensed along the supermarket aisles of our culture" (51).

beer's slogan and exposes the underlying artificiality of such phrases as "tang of wilderness" by associating it the scripted and overused narratives.

As much as Duncan is invested in deconstructing notions of naturalized masculine roles, Atwood uses Marian to critique the (re)production of femininity and the naturalization of female behavior.[24] Atwood herself reveals in a 1978 interview that she had a specific "model pattern" in mind when writing the novel that women were supposed to take a "crummy job and marry away from it" (Oates, "A Conversation with Margaret Atwood" 7).[25] In fact, a look into contemporary conduct manuals and textbooks reveals the gendered expectations that were circulating in print. In a 1958 textbook on advertising and selling entitled *What Makes Women Buy*, Janet L. Wolff spells out the social, cultural, and psychological reasons behind women's buying habits. In the section "What Do Women Really Want?", Wolff explains that women's "natural interests and enthusiasms" are developed in childhood and carry into adulthood, causing them to be genuinely attracted to certain products which appeal to these "natural interests." Amongst the eight listed topics, the interests include: "(1) […] an absorbing interest in home and family relationships and activities; (2) top interest in food is related to practical problems and special emotional considerations; (3) home decorating is a high natural interest with creative satisfaction and social value; (4) women's interest in personal appearance is characterized by desires for realness and for immediate results"

[24]Susan Bordo spells out this notion by aptly claiming "there is no 'natural' body. Cultural practices, far from exerting their power *against* spontaneous needs, 'basic' pleasures or instincts, or 'fundamental' structures of body experience, are already and always inscribed, as Foucault has emphasized, 'on our bodies and their materiality, their forces, energies, sensations, and pleasures'" (142).

[25] Interestingly, Atwood also reveals in the interview, "Even in 1969, when the book was finally published, some critics saw the view as essentially 'young' or 'neurotic.' I would mature, they felt, and things (i.e. marriage and kids) would fall into place" (Oates 7). What these critics' opinion illustrates is the gendered expectations for Atwood herself. Written in 1965 when Atwood was 26, the novel (although not published until 1969) represented for critics the work of a woman who had not yet embraced prescribed gender roles.

(153). These "natural interests," centering on the duties of reproduction and domesticity, are juxtaposed with women's "cultivated interests." "Cultivated interests" originate from necessity, such as "cleaning the house is woman's work. Women find it necessary to take an interest whether or not they like it" (189). Wolff's contention that women hold both innate and taught interests, in my opinion, is not meant to show women as complex human beings. Rather, Wolff means to generalize about women's needs and desires. There is a set of interests in which women *should* take an interest and to do otherwise would be going against expectation as well as nature.

Arlene Dahl's 1967 advice book in the "art of femininity" also suggests "truly feminine women have one basic quality in common. They like men" (Dahl 7). In *Always Ask a Man*, Dahl does just that—asks men what the key to femininity is, and their almost universal reply is that the key to femininity is to make a man feel important and submit to him: "If you don't give a man the chance to look after you, he'll soon give up and let you look after yourself!" (17). This version of femininity is not disputed. "The very fact that you *want* to please men is a sure sign that your femininity is in working order," and with this "resource," you can and will achieve anything—that is, if you can attract and keep a man with your femininity (13). Helen Gurley Brown, in the popular manual from 1962, *Sex and the Single Girl*, claims a similar definition for femininity. The "female female" might "look like a Dresden doll and still hate men" (86). Hating men, Brown emphatically claims, is not feminine. She also describes sexiness for a woman as accepting "all the functions of a woman. You like to make love, have babies, nurse them and mother them (or think you would). Being sexy means that you accept all the parts of your body as worthy and lovable…your reproductive organs, your breasts, your

alimentary tracts. You even welcome menstruation as the abiding proof of your fertility" (65). What both Brown and Dahl describe as "true" femininity is inextricably bound up not only with an undisputed worship of men and subjugation to them but also with the "fulfillment" of what their biology dictates.

About a decade earlier, *On Becoming a Woman*, a conduct manual by Mary McGee Williams and Irene Kane, was published. Despite the extent of the title, the work is almost exclusively concerned with conveying information on how to attract, date, marry, and keep men.[26] In a chapter about how to get boys interested in you, the authors contend, "Boys *like* girls, basically. They're sitting around just *waiting* to be interested. Nature is grand that way" (59). Along with the commandment that girls who attend school should not skip breakfast, the authors include the following finding by pollster Elmo Roper: "If I were to name one area as the single most dangerous spot in our health picture—from the standpoint of proper eating and good nutrition, it would be the neglect of breakfast by our teen-age girls, the mothers of tomorrow" (qtd. in Williams 78). Startling first is the emphasis on breakfast alone, as if it is the only meal in the day that *should* be eaten. The second surprising observation is the undisputed linkage between teenage girls and their status as future mothers. "So there," continue the authors, "Speaking of mothers of tomorrow brings us back to you and love and marriage and that, *naturally*, brings us back to boys. And getting boys interested" (78, my emphasis). The "logical" connection between dieting, the conditioning of women for motherhood, and young women's desire to attract boys goes unchallenged here.

[26] This is quite evident in the opening pages of the text in which the authors, when explaining menstruation and reproduction, explain that only when "you know the deep, true love that a woman feels for a man, when you experience the tremendous joy of comforting, sustaining and understanding a man you love," and, consequently, bear him children, will "you […] be acting the role you were created for" (22).

Marian's rejection of the *shape* of femininity is also a questioning of naturalization of femininity at large.[27] Marian believes Peter, after "clinically" running his hands over her during their lovemaking, had read a marriage manual becomes "[I]f you got something new you went out and bought a book that told you how to work it" (162). Germaine Greer's indictments of patriarchy, consumerism, and science focus first on formulations of the female body that have caused the naturalization of various forms of oppression, particularly the suppression of the physical body.[28] In the chapter entitled "Curves," Greer contends that the "most popular image of the female despite the exigencies of the clothing trade is all boobs and buttocks," making the "cuddlesome" female a more prized possession to men (33).[29] Large breasts are a "millstone around a

[27] Further, when asked whether she had to invent new forms in order to employ a "female mythology," Atwood notes the difficulty in avoiding the "mythology in which women are either Earth Mothers or—well, the Angel-Whore syndrome" (Van Varsveld 67). Her solution to this dichotomy is to "transform [the mythology], rearrange it and shift the values," much like Molly Hite in *The Other Side of the Story* (Van Varsveld 67). Referencing Atwood's 1976 novel *Lady Oracle*, Hite argues that in telling "the other side" in a confessional mode, Atwood's main character "is immediately implicated in describing her own situations under the gaze of others: of the people who variously constitute her according to their own requirements" (127). Much of feminist criticism "has demonstrated that the decentering and destabilizing tendencies of recent experimental writing have a great deal in common with the feminist project of overturning culturally constructed oppositions," enabling women who wish to write as feminists the opportunity to rearrange the markers of hegemony (Hite 16). I would argue that in Atwood's case specifically, a rearrangement of mythology means an incorporation of a queer aesthetic as well as an environmental one.

[28] But, indeed Greer's own edicts are marred by a distrust of homosexuality as a means of opening up sexual possibilities: "Sex must be rescued from the traffic between powerful and powerless, masterful and mastered, sexual and neutral, to become a form of communication between potent, gentle, tender people, which cannot be accomplished by denial of heterosexual contact. The Ultra-feminine must refuse any longer to countenance the self-deception of the Omnipotent Administrator, not so much by assailing him as freeing herself from the desire to fulfil [*sic*] his expectations" (18). Later, she claims that homosexuality emerges as a result "the inability of the person to adapt to his given sex role," despite advocating for the de-pathologizing of homosexuality (29). As much as Greer decries the nuclear family of the sixties as destructive of women's individuality, she is not willing to give up the ghost of reproduction and childbearing. She concedes "the problem of the survival of humanity is not a matter of ensuring the birth of future generations but of limiting it. The immediate danger to humanity is that of total annihilation within a generation or two, not the failure of mankind to breed" (233).

[29] She is equated with a possession here, a new appliance or a kitchen gadget. Germaine Greer's speculation that "the sexual sell was oversell" emphasizes her demand that women "prize this discontent as the first stirring of the demand for life" (13). The motivation behind her influential *The Female Eunuch* lies in her contention that "women must learn how to question the most basic assumptions about feminine normality in order to reopen the possibilities for development which have been successively locked out by conditioning" (14).

woman's neck," which emphasizes their function and utility in view of the men who reduce women to their parts.[30] In the cases of dieting women, whether they are originally thin or curvy, the end result is inducement "to appeal to a buyer's market" (35). Marian chafes under the expectations imposed by Peter, who constantly labels her "not like the other girls," as an understanding type, and by the other women in her life, who all appear to be falling into the trap of femininity by either becoming pregnant, getting married, or striving to attract the attentions of men with their exterior.

Marian's discomfort with naturalized femininity manifests in several ways throughout the novels, including her discomfort with Clara's pregnancy. Confronted with the "thick sargasso-sea of femininity" during an office party,[31] Marian is repulsed by and withdraws from the "peculiar creatures" who are her female coworkers. She is disturbed by their "continual flux between outside and the inside, taking things in, giving them out, chewing, words, potato-chips, burps, grease, hair, babies, milk, excrement, cookies, vomit, coffee, tomato juice, blood, tea, sweat liquor, tears, and garbage" (181). This version of femininity is horrifying to Marian and not just because, as Rich points out in *Of Woman Born*, "patriarchal mythology" makes women the site of two contradictory interpretations: "one, that the female body is impure, corrupt, the site of discharges, bleedings, dangerous to masculinity, a source of moral and physical contamination, 'the devil's gateway. On the other hand, as mother the woman is beneficent, sacred, pure,

[30] Greer also points out that various terms applied to women and their genitalia reflect their connection to certain foods: "*honey, sugar, dish, sweety-pie, cherry, cookie, chicken* and *pigeon*…[and if] a woman is food, her sex organ is for consumption also, in the form of *honey-pie, hair-pie,* and *cake-* or *jelly-roll*" (265).

[31] Marian seems particularly sensitive to her surroundings, whether outside in the stifling urban environment or inside the artificial coolness of the office building. Office buildings, which Jerry Mander labels "sensory deprivation chambers," pose a complex hindrance in modern society. In human-created, artificial environments, the sense become dulled, and according to Mander, "[w]ith all organic life absent and with the senses deprived of most possibilities for human experience," the mere presence of other human beings have created a "hot sexual environment" (65).

asexual, nourishing; and the physical potential for motherhood—that same body with its bleedings and mysteries—is her single destiny and justification in life" (13). The paradox haunts Marian because these women are "objects viewed as outline and surface only" (*Edible Woman* 181). But she is also horrified because she recognizes herself as one of them: "[H]er body the same, identical, merged with that other flesh that choked the air in the flowered room with its sweet organic scent" (181). The realization causes her to yearn for Peter's presence in the room, to be able to hold onto him. I would argue, it is not because she needs to be rescued by a man; rather, to touch a man, to be in a masculine presence, is to disassociate herself from the sea of femininity and to maintain her true affiliation—that of maleness. Allowing herself to be consumed by the sea of femininity is to give into "their fluidity sustained by somewhere within my bones, without by a carapace of clothing and make-up" and to succumb to their compulsory consumption (181).

In her short essay "The Female Body," Atwood acknowledges that the female body is a "hot topic," but that the range of possibilities is wide and includes the marketing, manipulation, personal connection, and reproduction of the body. Atwood lists the accoutrements of dress for the female:

> The basic Female Body comes with the following accessories: garter belt, panty girdle, crinoline, camisole, bustle, brassiere, stomacher, chemise, virgin zone, spike heels, nose ring, veil, kid gloves, fishnet stocking, fichu, bandeau, Merry Widow, weepers, chokers, barrettes, bangles, beads, lorgnette, feather boa, basic black, compact, Lycra stretch one-piece with modesty panel, designer peignoir, flannel nightie, lace teddy, bed, head. (*Good Bones* 71)

All these "accessories" are items that in some way alter women or make them more visually appealing for a consuming audience. Purchasing these items incorporates women in the act of consumption. Such sinister accessories as "chokers," "spike heels" and "boas" point up the dangerous materiality of these things. They are mostly objects meant to pinch and trap the woman's body, reshaping it to conform to men's idealized expectations. Marian sees advertisements for girdles and thinks, "The female form, I thought is supposed to appeal to men, not to women, and men don't usually buy girdles. Though perhaps the lithe young woman was a self-image; perhaps the purchasers thought of their own youth and slenderness back in the package" (98). This causes her to remember the maxim that "no well-dressed woman is ever without her girdle," and the particular meaning of the word "ever" disturbs Marian. These products are the trick of advertisements, made necessary and omnipresent for women by a detached body of men who determine the "right" way for women to look.

The most telling moment of the specific male-centered expectation for women comes when Marian visits the salon. Sofia Sanchez-Grant reads the scene as the "female space [that] is not a place for women to fulfil their own desires, but a space created for women to fulfil the desires of men" (85). Femininity and all its ideals and expectations surrounding the appearance of femininity are "a male-assigned role, an act and an acting out of feminine scripts, a masquerade. Indeed, femininity has been compared to tranvestism, since, for a woman as for a transvestite, femininity is a role requiring 'make-up, costumes, well-rehearsed lines…in order to be properly performed'" (Bouson 27). Everything in the salon is pink and mauve and frivolous, and Marian feels "like a slab of flesh, an object" (*Edible Woman* 229). It is not just the apparatuses of prescribed

femininity that bears weight here; it is also the feeling of entrapment that troubles Marian. Feeling "as passive as though she was being admitted to a hospital to have an operation," Marian is astonished by everyone else's acquiescence to the forced alteration (229). She lies like the Eliotic patient etherized upon the table, being acted upon rather than acting for herself. Feeling "curiously paralysed," Marian sits "fascinated by the draped figure prisoned in the filigree gold oval of the mirror" (229). The artificiality of the stylized hairdos, the nail polish, and the false eyelashes irks Marian, as does the "assembly-line of women seated in identical mauve chairs under identical whirring mushroom-shaped machines" (230). In this way, the salon resembles a factory in which the raw female material is processed to form them in similar, artificial, doll-like shapes with a similar destination—consumption by men.[32]

Besides the patriarchal demands placed upon women's bodies, there are women who seemingly voluntarily engaged in these compulsory acts as a means of snaring mates. Atwood illustrates this through the "office virgins," three girls with whom Marian works and who appear are the stereotypes of helpless, young women in pursuit of a man. All artificial blondes, they are virgins for varying reasons, but Marian lumps them together to illustrate their inconsequentiality:

> Millie from a solid girl-guide practicality ("I think in the long run it's better to wait until you're married, don't you? Less bother."), Lucy from social quailing

[32] Taking her cue from Atwood's awareness of Betty Friedan's, Coral Ann Howells proposes reading *The Edible Woman* through this lens because it "is an imaginative transformation of a social problem into comic satire as one young woman rebels against her feminine destiny" (39). The evocation of rebellion is immediately evoked in Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*. Friedan explains in the book, first published in 1963, "I do not accept the answer that there is no problem because American women have luxuries that women in other times and lands never dreamed of; part of the strange newness of the problem is that it cannot be understood in terms of the age-old material problems of man: poverty, sickness, hunger, cold. The women who suffer this problem have a hunger that food cannot fill" (71). Friedan's "Happy Housewife" myth gets at the crux of the issue—women, seemingly fulfilled by home and its objects, husband, and children, are actually missing an essential piece of themselves and their happiness.

("What would people *say*?"), which seems to be rooted in a conviction that all bedrooms are wired for sound, with society gathered at the other end tuning its earphones; and Emmy, who is the office hypochondriac, from the belief that it would make her sick, which it probably would. (16).

Marian witnesses the office virgins' attempts to ensnare men and draw them away from their jobs. Lucy, "trailing herself like a many-plumed fish-lure with glass beads and three spinners and seventeen hooks," attempts to attract the men who are "lurking, as ravenous as pike" (118). They are the food themselves, the bait to be consumed by the men they hope to trap, as well as hunters.

The hunter/hunted motif is also descriptive of Marian's relationship with Peter. At the same time it illustrates a larger cultural narrative that connects the subjugation of women as well as animals.[33] Coral Ann Howells points out the significance that "Peter represents the law-giver and the hunter in Marian's scenarios of violence, whereas she is the escape artist identified with the spaces of the wilderness" (48). As the hunted, Marian acquires a primitive, animal sense of survival, choosing flight from the hunter/oppressor.

[33] In Atwood's second novel, *Surfacing*, her nameless narrator has a similar attachment to animals. The novel follows the narrator and three of her friends into sparsely inhabited Northern Canada to discover the disappearance of her naturalist and biologist father. She not only empathizes with animals on the level in which she progressively considers herself one but also as a conservationist concerned with animal welfare. She begins to view American hunters, and eventually Americans in general, as careless and vicious because "there is nothing inside the happy killers to restrain them, no conscience or pity; for them the only things worthy of life are human, their own kind of human, framed in the proper clothes and gimmicks, laminated" (129). It's not just animals that should be killed; it is humans who do not look or act "properly." Because she has abandoned her child, a child she did not want in the first place, the narrator sees herself as an outsider and "unnatural," but she is definitely unwilling to go through childbirth again. The medical profession, run by men, is another method for tricking women into thinking motherhood is natural despite the fact that birth control comes in "handy green plastic packages, moon-shaped so that the woman can pretend she's still natural, cyclical, instead of a chemical slot machine" (79). Childbirth makes her feel like "a dead pig, your legs are up in a metal frame, they bend over you, technicians, mechanics, butchers, students clumsy or snickering practicing on your body, they take the baby out with a fork like a pickle out of a pickle jar. After that they fill your veins up with red plastic" (79). This description underscores the artificiality of childbirth and the subduing of women in a profession dictated by the patriarchy and unnaturalness.

Ainsley even accuses Marian of choosing clothes "as though they're a camouflage or a protective colouration" (6). During their engagement party, near the end of the novel, Marian again shows her resistance to being consumed and pursued, specifically when Peter tries to capture her with his camera. Susan Sontag claims, "There is an aggression in every use of the camera" and "to understand the camera as a weapon of aggression, implies there will be casualties" (7, 39). She cannot stand to have her picture taken by Peter. In order to avoid becoming a casualty, Marian flees from the party. Marian again refuses reproduction in the form of photography, and at the same time she refuses to allow Peter to consume her through the camera's lens. But we should not read Marian's flight from Peter, his camera, and the engagement party into the arms of Duncan as giving into heterosexual desire. Rather, Marian is merely acting upon what her appearance suggests—she looks, in her new hairdo, make-up, and evening dress, like a prostitute. Duncan, however, recognizes the artificiality of the "feminine" costume she is wearing, removes her girdle, makes her take off her make-up and then tells her she smells "funny" (279). He wants her in a natural state, but their act of heterosexual sex is followed by Duncan's observation that "[t]here's just altogether too much flesh around here. It's suffocating" (279). The suggestion seems to be that the act is unsatisfying for both because what it threatens is the increase of flesh; that is, the possibility of procreation. Marian is not Duncan's first, and in admitting it, Duncan shatters Marian's last image of herself as feminine. In fact, his earlier claim that he might be a "latent homosexual" or perhaps even a "latent heterosexual" is an admission of "the futility of it all" (206). "[A]ll these scenes have been done already," Duncan explains to Marian, "I mean *ad nauseam*. They sort of get limp and sinuous and passionate, they try so hard,

and I start thinking oh god it's yet another bad imitation of whoever it happens to be a bad imitation of, and I lose interest" (207). These women and all women, Duncan realizes, are caught in the production-consumption trap themselves. Consuming images in order to later produce them in imitation during heterosexual encounters is yet another way getting trapped.

But the first mention of Peter's camera comes during his hunting story, in which he describes the gutting and disemboweling of a rabbit he and his friend (the appropriately named) Trigger shot. Sontag links the act of photography with the commercial symptoms of a consumptive society: "Needing to have reality confirmed and experience enhanced by photographs is an aesthetic consumerism to which everyone is now addicted. Industrial societies turn their citizens into image-junkies; it is the most irresistible form of mental pollution" (24). But Marian's other objection to being photographed lies in her fear of being captured forever. This not only has the meaning of being imprisoned in marriage to Peter but also, in her relationship to the timing of queerness, she desires impermanence.

In her 1971 poetry collection *Power Politics*, Atwood includes a poem pertinently entitled "She Considers Evading Him." The poem reads like an addendum to Marian's constant flight in *The Edible Woman*, which Atwood characterizes as "evading, avoiding, running away, retreating, withdrawing" (Gibson 25). The narrator contends, "I can change my-/self more easily/than I can change you," illustrating the conscious modification of her own self through time and space (105). Her identity shifts from natural entity ("I could grow bark and/become a shrub") to primitive fertility figure to an old, genteel, arthritic lady, before finally becoming a tragic figure of death with a "waxed

farewell smile." It "would be inconvenient/but final" the narrator concludes, tacitly suggesting that death is the only alternative to the patriarchal implication of the various available femininities. Several other poems in the collection also involve similar testimonies to the required adaptability of women under the oppression of patriarchies and heterosexual coupledom, including "At first I was given centuries." In this poem, the narrator takes herself through several historical periods—prehistory, colonialism, World War II—to illustrate the intolerability of constantly chasing and giving herself to her male counterparts (115). Atwood explains, in her essay entitled "Animal Victims," that Canadian stories "are about animals *being* killed, as felt emotionally from inside the fur and feathers": "And for the Canadian animal, bare survival is the main aim in life, failure as an individual is inevitable, and extinction as a species is a distinct possibility" (*Survival* 74, 79). Marian appears to tap into her primitive "flight or fight" response each time she flees from something or someone that threatens to trap her. Like a rabbit being hunted, Marian runs from Peter after dinner one night. Once caught and brought to Len's apartment, Marian hides under the bed, coming out "furred and tufted with dust," literally resembling the furriness of a rabbit because she knows she is now "involved" with and trapped by Peter.

Because of her association with animals, it is significant that Marian's resistance to food begins with a refusal of meat. Maggie Humm points out, "Meat has begun to signify to Marian the grotesqueries of marriage and masculinity […] the men enact very openly their fantasies of violence and weaponry in the pursuit of women" (127). Bound up in this violence is the andocentricity of language, so that the "violence and enormity of this masculinity does not bespeak merely Peter's individual appetite for physical pleasure

but suggests as well the assaults of heterosexual relations" (Humm 148-9). Peter is a "real" man because he prefers meat (roast beef and filet mignon), but watching him "operate" on his steak, Marian visualizes the violence and subjugation of the once-living animal Peter is now eating:

> Watching him operating on the steak like that, carving a straight slice and then dividing it into neat cubes, made her think of the diagram of a planned cow at the front of one of her cookbooks: the cow with lines on it and labels to show you from which part of the cow all the different cuts were taken. […] The cow in the book, she recalled, was drawn with eyes and horns and an udder. It stood there quite naturally, not at all disturbed by the markings on its hide. Maybe with lots of careful research they'll eventually be able to breed them, she thought, so that they're born already ruled and measured. (163-64)

Marian recognizes the very realness of the "hunk of muscle" in front of her. Without the filter of the cellophane of the supermarket's packaging, Marian is disturbed by the anthropomorphized image of the "real cow that once moved and ate and was killed, knocked on the head as it stood in a queue like someone waiting for a streetcar" (164). But eventually she cannot eat eggs either because the yolk looks like "a significant and accusing yellow eye" (174). Indeed, her refusal to eat animal products, meat and eggs, and eventually even the pumpkin seeds (which are like the children of fruits) offered by Duncan, she is voicing her own desire to live. Marian also conveys empathy for and awareness of the natural world that is not exclusive to animals. Peeling a carrot, once she is completely sworn off animal products, she realizes, "It's a root […] it grows in the ground and sends up leaves. Then they come along and dig it up, maybe it even makes a

sound, a scream too low for us to hear, but it doesn't die right away, it keeps on living, right now it's still alive" (*Edible Woman* 194). The rice in the rice pudding begins to look like cocoons, and she thinks the air pockets in sponge cake are like "the bursting of a thousand tiny lungs" (227). What each of these reactions adds up to is that Marian, in imagining all the food as living, breathing things is imagining herself in their positions.

The description of Peter carving his meat brings to mind the influential feminist tract, *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, in which Carol J. Adams proposes a "cycle of objectification, fragmentation and consumption, which links butchering and sexual violence in our culture" (47). The main argument of Adams's work is that the rhetoric and thematic premise that links the subjugation of women with the butchering, mistreatment and eating of animals has its roots in an oppressive patriarchal culture. Adams labels women and animals the "absent referent" in order to illustrate that "there is fragmented flesh and there are kitchens in which it is found" (61). Adams's own reading of *The Edible Woman* centers on Marian's turn toward vegetarianism (Adams reads her refusal to eat as a pointed political and ethical turn toward not eating meat) which Adams describes as "[d]omestic dynamics, a sexual war" and Marian's intuited "link to other animals, suggesting that a challenge to meat eating is linked to an attack on the sovereign individual subject" (131). But there is another facet of Marian's rejection of meat that Adams does not take far enough: the convenience of supermarket purchases in which the animal becomes the missing link in an economy of the quick-kill, ever-ready, convenient meat product, "pre-packaged in cellophane, with name-labels and price-labels stuck on it" (*Edible Woman* 164). In this manner, meat eating does not just evoke the dual subjugation and violent division of women and animals; it also reproduces narratives of

home economy and its link to convenience and rapid ecological destruction.

Another connection to animals comes in Atwood's 1969 poetry collection *The Animals in That Country*. She includes poems about hunted animals, which can be doubly interpreted as subjugated humans. The narrator of the eponymous poem reveals, "In that country the animals/ have the face of people," and indeed *are* people at times (2). The split occurs when the narrator argues in "this country," the animals are truly animals and always the victims of human violence and mishap (3). The split does not seem so broad once one realizes there is a desire for possession of natural spaces and entities, as revealed in the "The trappers." The initiative of that poem lies in the desire "to make each/tree and season an owned/territory" (35). Hunted and trapped natural entities, particularly land and animals, like Atwood's female characters, that refuse to be named and owned make impenetrable and dangerous chaos for the decidedly male pioneer in "Progressive insanities of the pioneer":

> If he had known unstructured
> space is a deluge
> and stocked his log house-
> boat with all the animals
> even the wolves,
> he might have floated.
> But obstinate he
> stated, The land is solid
> and stamped,
> watching his foot sink

down through stone

up to the knee.

Things

refused to name themselves; refused

to let him name them. (38-9)

But the linkage between women and animals includes another, wider component—the linkage of women with other natural entities that results in her further subjugation: "Within a patriarchal economy women's bodies may be counted as 'a natural resource' (by the same logic presumably that rape becomes an instrument of war) but they are also expendable" (Howells 59). Certainly, this is how Peter relates to Marian, as she is the "natural resource"—the "sensible," obvious and obligatory choice for Peter's marriage partner at this point in his life.

But Peter, despite his pursuit of Marian, has homosocial tendencies and queer desires when it comes to his male friends. Peter and his friends seem to form a homosocial bachelor group and only succumb to marriage to women as a last resort. The aptly named Trigger, Peter's oldest friend, is getting married, and marriage is described by Marian as an "epidemic. Just before I'd met [Peter] two had succumbed, and in the four months since that another two had gone under without much warning" (22). Besides this diagnosis of marriage, Marian depicts Trigger and Peter as the last remaining bachelors, "clutch[ing] each other like drowning men, each trying to make the other the reassuring reflection of himself that he needed" (23). Peter describes Trigger as "the last of the Mohicans, noble and free, the last of the dinosaurs, destroyed by fate and lesser species, and the last of the dodos, too dumb to get away" and Trigger's bride as a

predator (65). Peter's prescribed response to the impending marriages of his friends is to bed Marian under any circumstances. She imagines his choices of locations as always prescripted and contrived. The field to which Peter takes Marian after one of his friend's marriages "was, I guessed, a hunting story from one of the outdoorsy male magazines; I remembered he had worn a plaid jacket. The sheepskin I placed in one of the men's glossies, the kind with lust in pent-houses. But the bathtub? Possibly one of the murder mysteries he read as what he called 'escape literature'" (60). Marian cannot reconcile these attempts at asserting his sexual prowess with any part of his personality, including "a reckless, young-man gesture, like jumping into a swimming pool with your clothes on, or putting things on your head at parties" (62). These spontaneous gestures do not suit Peter because Marian knows he is only able to act with intent. Without the reinforcement of his homosocial bonds and his queer family, Peter retreats into calculated prescriptions of masculinity. His sex acts are performances of this masculinity, and Marian quickly catches onto this. He is seemingly forced to take Marian as his bride. "[P]eople get suspicious of a single man after a certain age," Peter explains, partly as justification for asking her to marry him, "they start thinking you're a queer or something" (93).[34]

The queer relationship between Trevor and Fish, with Duncan as their "child," not only form a queer family unit, with two men at the head (Trevor is mother and Fish is father), but also address queerness and the problems of sexuality and procreation in their graduate theses. Trevor is exploring the "Womb Symbol" in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. According to Trevor, "One sexual role after another is presented to [Alice]

[34] Marian imagines her family thinking similar things about her: "They had probably been worried she would turn into a high-school teacher or a maiden aunt or a dope addict or a female executive, or that she would undergo some shocking physical transformation, like developing muscles and a deep voice or growing moss" (189).

but she seems unable to accept any of them" (212). Rejecting lesbianism, maternity, phalluses, and other gendered symbols, Alice also evidently displays an "obsession with time, clearly a cyclical rather than a linear obsession" (212). What Trevor does not say outright is that Alice is queer, although his reading certainly speaks to her ever-shifting identity. But perhaps more interestingly is Fish's thesis on "Malthus and the Creative Metaphor." He argues that there is a connection between the rise in birth rates and the change in poetics in which "[p]eople get too narrow, too narrow, they're specializing too much" (215). "Man was in harmony with the purposes, the cyclical rhythms of Nature, and the earth said, Produce, Produce. Be fruitful and multiply, if you recall," Fish argues, likening artistic creation to birth, but saying, "It's the population explosion not the atomic explosion that we must all worry about" (216-7). He further suggests that a cataclysm in which all humans are killed is the only hope for a renewal of Nature. Through their academic work and their lifestyles, Trevor, Fish and Duncan all represent an alternative, modern family formation.

Ainsley's own conception of the "modern" family initially goes against notions of the nuclear family because she contends "the thing that ruins families these days is the husbands" (38). After seeing Clara's situation and somehow deciding to "correct" their imperfect situation by becoming pregnant herself, Ainsley proposes a "new" kind of family for herself—a father-less family. This might suggest Ainsley is willing to queer the notion of family to include her definition. But Ainsley claims that having a child "fulfills your deepest femininity" (39). But her homophobia, her fear of queerness, plays out in her insistence that her child *not* be gay. As Rich points out, "Yet the fear that our strength, or our influence, will 'make our sons into homosexuals' still haunts even

women who do not condemn homosexuality as such, perhaps because the power of patriarchal ideology still makes it seem a better fate for the boy to grow into a 'real man'" (211). Likewise, Friedan links the presence of the feminine mystique, like some sociologists who have gone before her, with the feminization of male children.[35] In fact, Ainsley undermines her own idea that women fulfill their femininity by bearing children on their own once she realizes the doctors have "proved it scientifically" that male children should have a strong Father Figure. Cries Ainsley, "If I have a little boy, he's absolutely *certain* to turn into a ho-ho-ho-homosexual!" (197). But Ainsley is also a contradiction in terms. For all her talk about the naturalness, righteousness, and the authenticity of pregnancy, Ainsley only buys into a superficial version of fertility. Ainsley sees pregnancy as a calling to her true nature, but, as we discover from her textbook-learning and psychology courses, she is merely following the prescriptions of modern notions of femininity and fertility. Marian observes that Ainsley appears to have a "layer of blubber on her soul" and that she will soon "be fat all over," the very opposite of Marian herself (173). Seeing it as her mission to change society's prudery surrounding sex and birth, Ainsley embarks on the mission to get pregnant under the guise of fulfilling an innate feminine necessity. Talking about the symbolism of wedding flowers, Ainsley rails against people's hypocrisy: "Nobody wants to admit they're really fertility symbols. What about a giant sunflower or a sheaf of wheat? Or a cascade of mushrooms and cactuses, that would be quite genital, don't you think?" (191). Besides the fact that

[35] Most notably among them Philip Wylie, whose famous rant, 1943's *Generation of Vipers*, argued that the "momism" and the over-coddling of children by ineffectual mothers had caused an entire generation of male children to turn into sissies. He declares that "MOM is the end product of SHE," and his disparaging description of this monolithic MOM includes an indictment against her morality and political aptitude: "Mom's first gracious presence at the ballot-box was roughly concomitant with the start toward a new all-time low" in amongst, other things, "moral degeneration, civic corruption, smuggling, bribery, theft, murder, homosexuality, drunkenness, financial depression, chaos and war. Note that. The degenerating era, however, marked new highs in the production of junk. Note that, also" (184, 188-9).

Ainsley perversely *pursues* Len, who is described as a "sort of seducer of young girls," to become the father of her child, she is also portrayed as child-like (30).

All of Ainsley's innocence cannot cover up her true intentions because she is "in reality a scheming superfemale carrying out a foul plot against [Len], using him in effect as an inexpensive substitute for artificial insemination with a devastating lack of concern for his individuality" (130). Ainsley is the sexualized child, a contradiction in terms because at the same time she attempts to attract Len with her purity, she does so in order to bed him. Describing how "innocent" Ainsley can look, Marian notes, "she has a pink-and-white blunt baby's face, a bump for a nose, and large blue eyes she can make as round as Ping-Pong balls" (7). The calendar in which she tracks her fertility has a "picture of a little girl in an old-fashioned dress sitting on a swing with a basket of cherries and a puppy" (88). Ainsley performs her child-like innocence as a way of snaring Len. Choosing inert innocence, Ainsley becomes like a "pitcher-plant in a swamp with its hollow bulbous leaves half-filled with water, waiting for some insect to be attracted, drowned and digested" (78). Despite the fact that Len decidedly pursues Ainsley, as she makes herself the bait, she is also the hunter in this particular scenario. What she is actually doing, however, is definitively calculated and premeditated. "Natural selection" takes on a different meaning when Ainsley is choosing the father for her child. Marian sees Ainsley's pursuit as a kind of unethical hunt, like Peter's hunt of both the rabbit and herself: "It's like bird-liming, or spearing fish by lantern, or something" (72). When Ainsley accuses Len of having "uterus envy," she is reversing the Freudian notion of penis envy. Her efforts to justify her pregnancy at "perfectly natural and beautiful" are converted by Len into "Nauseating!" and "You're unclean!" (172-3).

Since criticism on *The Edible Woman* labels the final scene of the novel, in which Marian bakes a woman-shaped cake, chases off Peter, and shares the cake with Duncan, as the moment of greatest thematic weight to Atwood's feminist (or protofeminist, depending on whom you ask) premise, I take my cue from previous critics in discussing the ending at length. Critics debate about whether Marian's inability to eat is a conscious choice, a way of demonstrating her agency, or, as others suggest, a manifestation of her disembodiment, her body's reaction to the cultural forces that forcefully inscribed femininity on her. I would argue that Marian's starvation is self-imposed, even though Atwood is careful to include Marian's frequent feelings of helplessness. This conditioning has lead previous readers to believe that Marian is merely a foil for society's woes, that she herself is not and cannot be capable of choosing to not eat. While Alan Dawe labels the ending "ambiguous but somehow triumphant" (a view with which I am apt to agree), Catherine McLay brusquely concludes, "A cake is a cake, an edible; a woman's a woman; not edible. The dark voyage, downwards and inwards, is over. She has returned to life and to consuming" (138). Sharon Rose Wilson has a more libratory interpretation of Marian's cake-eating, based on her reading of fairy tales:

> No longer trapped in a tower, burrow, or forbidden chamber, but thinking of herself in the first-person singular again, Marian faces the 'horrors' of both disordered life and apartment and penetrates through layers to discover another floor to reality. By baking, decorating, serving, and consuming the cake-woman image she has been conditioned to project, Marian announces, to herself and others, that she is not food. (96)

T.D. MacLulich's contention is that Marian eats the cake only symbolically, "accepting

her femininity by incorporating the feminine cake-woman or cake-child into herself. It could even be argued that Marian is symbolically impregnating herself, or at least accepting the possibility of pregnancy." Fellow Canadian author Jane Rule says the cake is not the "profound symbol" that other critics have labeled it. Rather, it is "a resolving trick more than anything else," which signals the book's entire tendency toward being "the puff pastry it claims to be—a treat of wit and invention" (44, 45). What each of these interpretations reveals is the incorporation of *others* into Marian's moment of discovery: she announces she is not food; she is accepting of pregnancy; and she is open to once again become consumer. They ignore the subjective revelation that Marian's cake-eating exposes: she bakes for herself an ideal woman and eats first the *lower half*, cakey sexual organs and all, symbolically and literally taking another woman into her mouth. Eating the genital region of the cake woman is not just a sexual performance; it also signifies the demolition of the symbolic woman's reproductive organs.

The decision to bake a sponge cake is indicative of her wish that the cake absorb the desire that has been temporarily displaced by the encounter with Duncan. The deliberateness with which she bakes and shapes the cake suggests male-centered consumption occurring in the salon scene. "You look delicious," she says to the cake, "Very appetizing. And that's what will happen to you; that what you get for being food" (298). Seeing she needs some kind of "test" to give Peter, apparently to see if he will stay with her, Marian turns consumer again. To the last, she clings to the idea that Duncan is the "mutation" and Peter "just a normal human being like most other people" (299). She is unconvinced of Peter's "normalness" though, and her attempt to provide Peter with a surrogate woman which he can consume fails. This is because she has

already claimed the cake woman for herself. Ainsley accuses her of "rejecting your femininity," as she is uncomfortable with Marian's expression of her queer desire (301). She begins to think of herself "in the first person singular again," and I would argue this is because she has firmed her queerness by eating the cake woman (306). That Marian feeds Duncan the cake is also significant. Duncan's participation in the cake-eating is merely his compliance with Marian's queerness. Marian, despite the fact that she has regained her appetite and presumably is not worried about assuming the shape of femininity, responds with disbelief to Duncan's contention that "Peter wasn't trying to destroy you. That's just something you made up. Actually you were trying to destroy him" (309). Duncan claims that Marian has returned to "so-called reality" by again becoming a consumer. Perhaps it is the strict biology fact that Marian, in order to live, *must* begin to eat again. Or that her decision to stop eating has actually done little to straighten out her curves or subvert her femaleness. Perhaps eating here has something to do with the fact that she has survived the hunt. As Atwood observes, in Canadian stories, "The survivor has no triumph or victory but the fact of his survival; he has little after his ordeal that he did not have before, except gratitude for having escaped with his life" (*Survival* 33). Having evaded Peter's snares, perhaps Marian is only able to insert herself back into the kitchen and bake for a different man. The imposition of a new order seems impossible at this junction, although the attempts have been courageously made.

The Rabelaisian carnival of which Bakhtin writes is also appropriate to mention here. The disruption of hierarchy and imposition of a new order is that for which Marian is striving. But the carnivalesque has its limits in Marian's. Like the "frenzied armadillo" at the zoo that Duncan describes, Marian seems doomed to repeat the patterns

from which she has been running the entire novel. Duncan notes, "[A]ll caged animals get [frenzied] when they're caged, it's a form of psychosis, and even if you set the animals free after they go like that they'll just run around in the same pattern" (101).[36] Through the act of baking the woman-shaped cake and consuming it, Marian makes a final attempt at marking out her queerness. The Bakhtinian conception of eating marks the grotesque body's "open unfinished nature, its interaction with the world" (281). Bakhtin also claims that the grotesque or exaggerated body is the body "in the act of becoming" since it involves "[e]ating, drinking, defecation, and other elimination (sweating, blowing the nose, sneezing) as well as copulation, pregnancy, dismemberment and swallowing up by another body" (317). Marian, in her own pursuit of becoming, actually avoids these acts because they stand for something more than the remaking or taking on of another body; they stand for all the social naturalization which has caused her revolt in the first place. But it is Marian's act of eating the cake's lower regions that brings me to Bakhtin's concept of the lower bodily stratum. In the edible woman's case, it is not just the bowels but also the genitals.

Atwood's conscious engagement with gender politics and women's social history is evident throughout her work, and in particular in *The Edible Woman*. In the introduction to the 1980 edition of the novel, Atwood discloses that she had not only "been speculating for some time about symbolic cannibalism" but also, having read Betty Friedan and Simone de Beauvoir "behind locked doors," she sees the book as

[36] Atwood herself observes, "It's noteworthy that my heroine's choices remain much the same at the end of the book as they are at the beginning: a career going nowhere, or marriage as an exit to it." The novel is, in fact, an anti-comedy because "the wrong person gets married. And the person who embodies the restrictive forces of society is in fact the person Marian gets engaged to" (Gibson 21). Perhaps that is to suggest that Marian's methods are ineffective in the end.

"protofeminist rather than feminist" (Atwood, Introduction). *The Edible Woman* certainly contains moments of protest, particularly as it relates to Marian's disgust toward prescribed and naturalized roles for women. Marian's refusal to eat is first a protest against the shape of femininity—to refuse food is to straighten her curves, in the hopes of looking and becoming more like a boy. Both Clara and Ainsley are unnatural perversions. Marian queers herself against these two by refusing to take in food, and by finally symbolically eating out the cake woman. Marian's refusal is also a protest against the linked subjugation of women and animals, as meat consumption in particular replicates the abuse of women and animals by patriarchy. Besides fleeing from situations in which she sees herself as food—the hunted animal and the bait for Peter—Marian adopts Duncan as a means of protesting against the cycle of restrictive and destructive process of production-consumption.

CONCLUSION:

ACTIVISM, POLLUTION & IDENTITY POLITICS

> Who has decided—who has the *right* to decide—for the countless legions of people who were not consulted that the supreme value is a world without insects, even though it be also a sterile world ungraced by the curving wing of a bird in flight? The decision is that of the authoritarian temporarily entrusted with power; he has made it during a moment of inattention by millions to whom beauty and the ordered world of nature still have a meaning that is deep and imperative.
>
> —Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*

> All this garrulous attention which has us in a stew over sexuality, is it not motivated by one basic concern: to ensure population, to reproduce labor capacity, to perpetuate the form of social relations: in short, to constitute a sexuality that is economically useful and politically conservative?
>
> —Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, An Introduction*

After Ken Kesey published *Sometimes a Great Notion*, he abandoned writing for about two decades until 1986's *Demon Box* (notwithstanding the writing he did while in jail on drug charges) to form the Merry Pranksters and travel the United States, experimenting with LSD. Christopher Isherwood continued to publish after *A Single Man*, exploring Vedanta specifically. Though he lived openly with his partner Don Bachardy for more than 30 years and became a kind of grandfather of the gay rights

movement, Isherwood never had a public coming-out. *Desert of the Heart* remains Jane Rule's most well-known novel despite many subsequent publications, including 1975's *Lesbian Images*. She became after an advocate for gay rights in Canada and spoke publically until her death in 2007. And embarking on the fifth decade of her career, Margaret Atwood continues to publish in all genres. Her 2003 post-apocalyptic novel *Oryx and Crake*, which won the Booker Prize, explores the disastrous consequences of human manipulation of animals' genes and disease.

I mention these biographical instances as a way of illustrating how the authors in this dissertation continued to deal with issues of environment and sexuality. After publishing their work in the 1960s, they all but abandon the combined issues of queer ecology taken up at that moment during the Cold War. It seems the postwar period provided the ideal moment for exploring the intersection of sexual politics and humans' relationship to the environment. The connection of concerns about population and resource and land usage after the Second World War exposed other issues about the way sexuality and naturalness were imagined. In many ways, this dissertation attempts to forge and iterate that connection. And while the juncture of concerns might not have been explicitly explored publicly or in an activist frame, the cultural moment that uncovered the social justice issues surrounding the deployment of meanings of naturalness was crucial to our current queer ecocritical analyses.

In some ways, the threat of nuclear warfare so prevalent during the height of the Cold War pointed up the dual concerns of population and environmental destruction. Nuclear annihilation signified the utter destruction of all life systems and the total

simplification and eradication of life on earth. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, published in 1962 and considered by many the touchstone of the modern environment movement, invokes the "heart of America" in order to tell the story of the poisoned environment. "The people had done it to themselves," Carson argues: "Nature has introduced great variety into the landscape, but man has displayed a passion for simplifying it. Thus, he undoes the built-in checks and balances by which nature holds the species within bounds" (3, 10). Michel Foucault, in the first part of his influential study of sexuality, *The History of Sexuality,* sees the "atomic situation" as a way for nations to threat the "biological existence of a population" rather than its "juridical existence" (*A History of Sexuality* 137). "[P]ower is situated and exercised at the level of life, the species, the race, and the large-scale phenomena of population," Foucault explains, highlighting the implied connection between population and species subjugation (137). In both of the descriptions, the authors lay ultimate blame on human folly since we are the creators of our own problems, whether relate to our environment, populace, attitudes toward alternative sexualities or the demolition of entire ecosystems.

But moving into the 70s, the delicate alliance between environmentalism and gay rights began to dissolve. Rather than saying the 60s were this utopic moment of revolution and redefinition, when cultural classifications were comprehensively deconstructed, I mean to suggest that as both the environmental and gay rights movements developed into the next decade, their agendas changed. That is not to suggest that there ever was a concerted effort on the parts of the pre-gay rights movement, homophile societies like Daughters of Bilitis and the Mattachine Society and

conservationists in associations like the Sierra Club to come together and examine the institutional and social pressures that consolidated to create a discourse that defined naturalness so narrowly. Instead, I wish to point out the divergence of the focus of both movements to demonstrate that authors like Kesey, Isherwood, Atwood, and Rule were preserving something of the original dialogue of heterosexism and anti-naturism that was at the crux of certain Cold War literary explorations.

Coming out of the 60s, the key link between population problems and environmental pressures was beginning to waver. In the mid-70s, Paul Ehrlich and John Holdren came up with the I=PAT formula. The equation links environmental impact with population, how many goods each person uses, and the pollution caused by those goods.[1] But it was also a bit of a retraction from Ehrlich's conclusion in *The Population Bomb* because it acknowledges there can be no simple correlation between the number of people living on the earth and the way the environment is affected. This going some way in unfastening the ties behind the state's affiliation with the naturalized, heterosexualized nuclear family. Ehrlich and Holdren's formula is based around five things they take to be "demonstrably true," amongst them that "'[e]nvironment' must be broadly construed to include such things as the physical environment of urban ghettos, the human behavioral environment, and the epidemiological environment" (1212). The emphasis here is on the human relationship to and usage of the environment, rather than, as it had previously

[1] In correcting the I=PAT equation, Hynes proposes a "split" in the use of resources, accounting for the difference between luxury goods and services and those needed for survival. The humanistic approach to the equation, Hynes suggest, would take into consideration not only environmental conservation but also consumerism since "[w]e have no national net consumption reduction rate, no concept of consumption replacement rate, no mainstream nonprofit environmental organizations whose mission is zero economic growth or zero consumption growth" (47). In other words, Hynes would acknowledge the diversity of American families, cultures, and communities.

been for earlier environmentalists, the preservation of wilderness spaces.

From the Human Ecology Symposium formed in 1968 to the first Earth Day celebrated on April 22, 1970, the focus of environmental groups shifted from how to keep the wilderness (primarily in the western United States) untamed and free to how the consequences of our initial impact, primarily in the form of air and water pollution, was effecting human populations. As Kirkpatrick Sale points out, a "newer understanding" for the environmental movement in the 1970s

> was for the most part anthropocentric, on the one hand regarding forests as a source of timber, rivers as a source of electric power, animals as a source of food and power, and on the other hand believing in the sanctity and health of the human habitat above all else. Thus, the issue of pollution became primary, concerned as it was with the protection of the human species and all it had to touch and ingest. (27-8)

Thus, "nature," as popularly understood, began to drop out of the vision of the environmental movement. Rather, a closer focus on temporality was instituted—how the way current human communities were being impacted by earlier interventions with nature and how one should and could preserve what was left of the wilds for future generations.

As the gay rights movements (with the Stonewall Riots in 1969 often marked as the touchstone of the movement) became more visible, its focus shifted as well. Instead of it being a action defined by the goals of homophile organizations, which emphasized gays' relationship to the heterosexual world and how one might achieve a "normal life,"

the gay rights movement became about identity and solidarity. Coming out of the closet became the catchphrase and the objective, and John D'Emilio argues, "The shift suggests an alteration not merely in attitudes—a willingness to acknowledge the presence of a gay subculture in American cities—but also a change in social reality, the rapid maturation in postwar America of a stable gay world that could no longer escape detection" (*Sexual Communities* 139). Additionally, Estelle B. Freedman and D'Emilio identify the "logic of consumer capitalism" as having "pushed the erotic beyond the boundaries of the monogamous couple as entrepreneurs" (325). The gay rights movement did challenge the primacy of the nuclear family, restrictive gender roles and the institution of marriage, but it did so with the goal of forming a different kind of society.

While the goals of both the environmental and gay rights movements pushed away from each other as the Cold War period moved into the 1970s, there are important moments captured in literary explorations during the height of the Baby Boom and the move into suburbia. From Kesey's examination of the meaning of masculinity and its connection to wilderness spaces to Isherwood's use of a homosexual man to examine the encroaching hoards of heterosexuals to Rule's questioning of the barrenness of the desert and the lesbian relationships to Atwood's critique of the consumerism and reproduction inherent in traditional female gender roles, the literature of the 1960s demonstrates there are still important discoveries to be made about the meaning and acceptance of naturalness.

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VITA

Born on September 24, 1982 in Mishawaka, Indiana, Jill Elizabeth Anderson was raised in a household with her mom and dad, two brothers, Collin and Tony, and one sister, Michele. After graduating from Penn High School in 2001, Jill earned her B.A. with Full Honors from Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana, in 2005, majoring in English and minoring in history and women's studies. Her now-diminished interest in William Faulkner brought her to the University of Mississippi for her Master's Degree in English. Currently a Ph.D. candidate in 20th-century American literature at the University of Mississippi, Jill lives with her husband, Jonathan, in Oxford, MS, and in her spare time enjoys running, yoga, weight training, sewing, weaving, baking, and watching BBC comedies and costume dramas.